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Short Stories

December 10th
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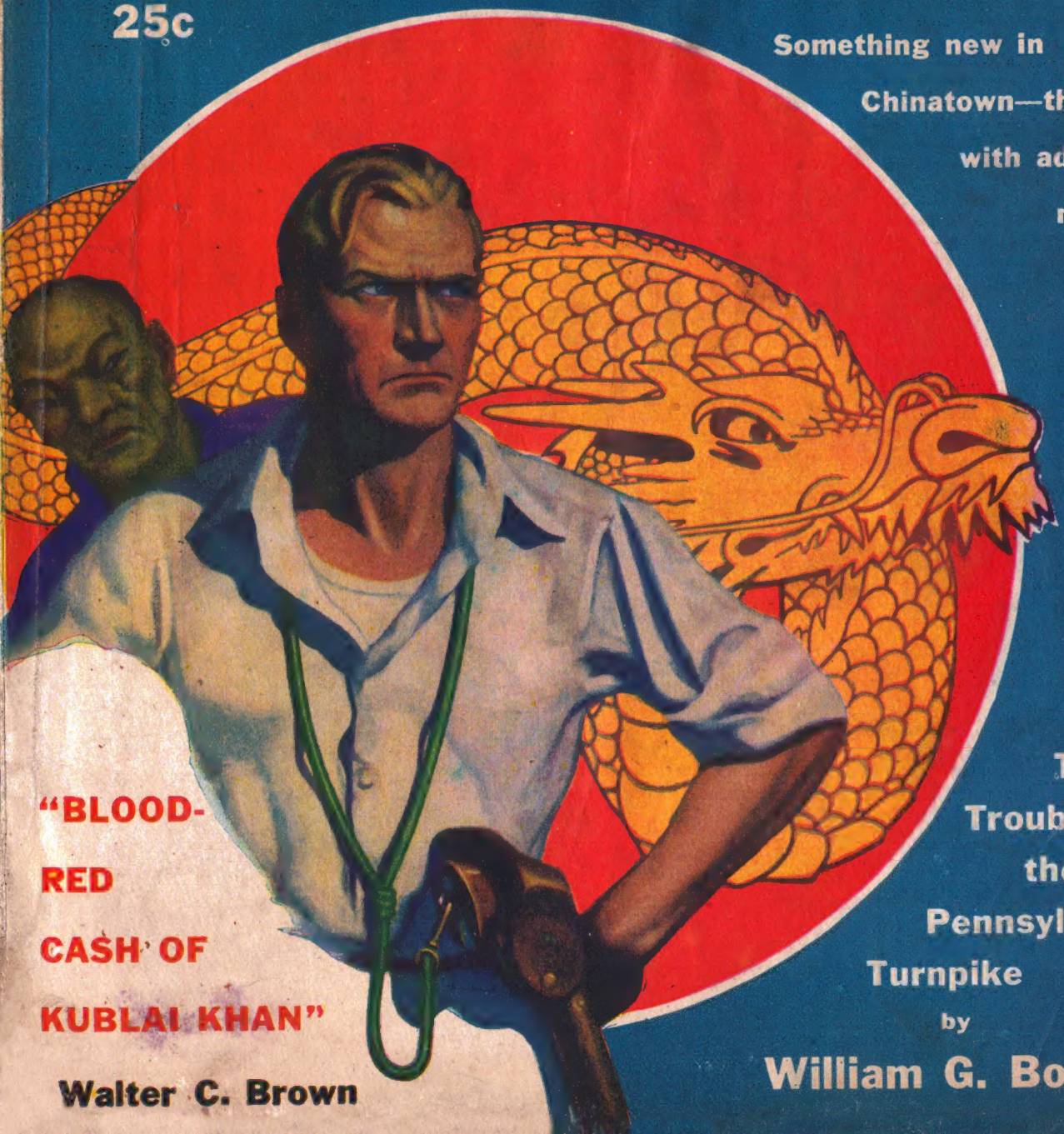

"BLOOD-RED CASH OF KUBLAI KHAN"
Walter C. Brown

Truck Trouble on the Pennsylvania Turnpike
by
William G. Bogart

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WILLIAM J. DELANEY, *President and Treasurer.* S. A. FRAZER, *Secretary.* D. McILWRAITH, *Editor.*

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Stories

latest stories—no reprints

December 10th, 1942

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Except for personal experiences the contents of this magazine is fiction. Any use of the name of any living person or reference to actual events is purely coincidental.

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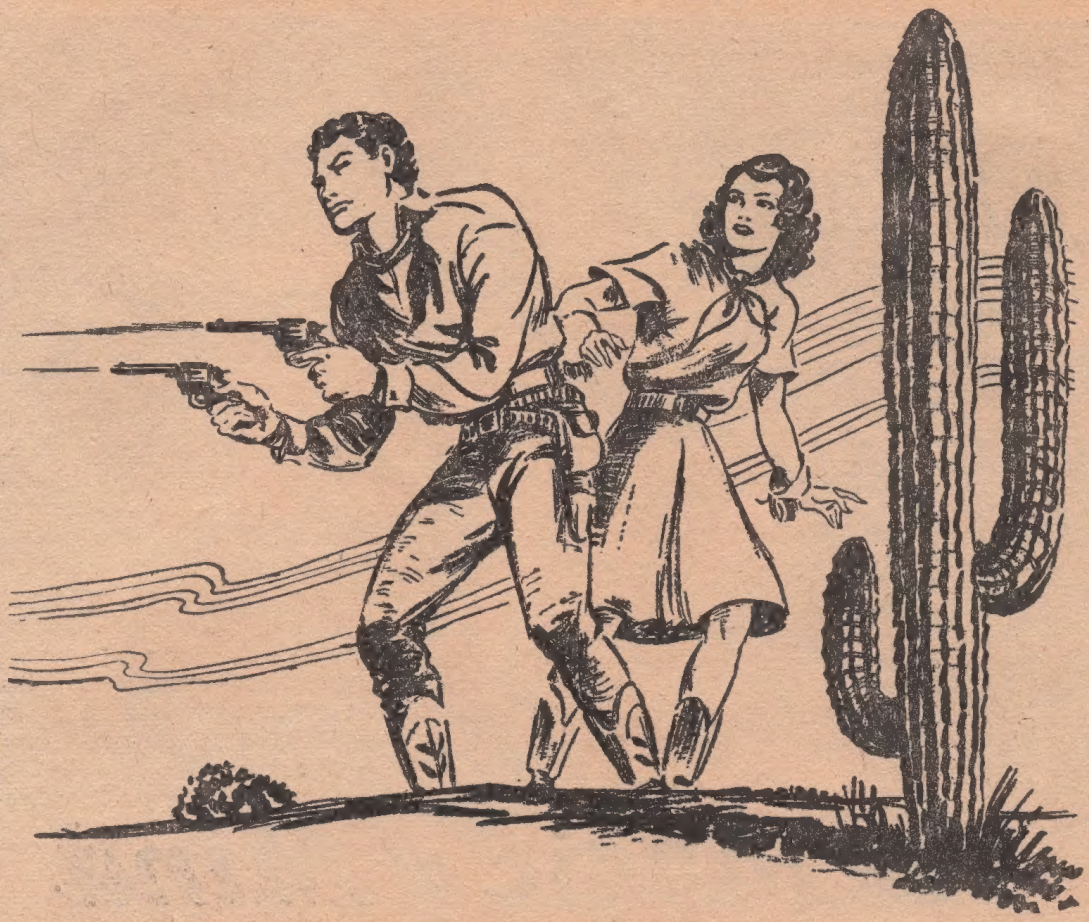

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The Story Tellers' Circle

The Penn Turnpike

THERE'S romance and danger in them thar trucks. Here's what W. G. Bogart has to say about his novelette in this issue:

I can remember my first trip across the mountains of Pennsylvania long before the now-famous Penn Turnpike was built. There were narrow, winding roads, steep grades, dangers created by sudden fog. More than one truck driver, pushing his job up one of the tortuous climbs, found his way blocked at the summit by a log rolled across the road. Hi-jackings were not unknown then.

The new Turnpike changed all this. Miles and miles of straightaway, plenty of room, a seventy-mile-an-hour speed . . . today truck drivers send their cargoes hi-balling over the Turnpike at almost express train speed. Naturally, shortly after the famous super-highway opened, I couldn't wait to cross it. I have since made the trip about half a dozen times, mainly at night, when you can pull into one of the welcome station stops and always find a road jockey who is willing to tell you about his experiences of the road.

I guess I've always felt the lure of the open road, the night, the thrill of piloting a cargo-on-wheels through the pre-dawn darkness. I myself, drove my first 10-ton Mack during a summer vacation when I was still a high school student. Around the same time I had some experience on the dirt race tracks. There was an era, too, of motorcycles. Luckily, I gave up before I broke my neck!

I've been with truck jockies on the long trek from New York up the Post Road to Albany; recently, I rolled out of Cincinnati one night with a truck-pusher on his way through Kentucky, on the way to Dixie and the South. Young fellows sticking at a job that gets into one's blood.

But I guess all writers eventually wind up back in New York City. There's something about the Big Town, especially if you find mystery-detective stuff the kind of yarns you like best to do. I took a little time out in the past year to spend in the Mid-west, writing a couple of novels. But here I am, back again, prowling the greatest city in the world, digging up plots for murder!

And yet, one of these nights I'll probably get that urge to be out on the open highway, at night, feeling the pound and rumble of huge wheels beneath me. And then will start another story of the night transport trucks, and the men who drive them.

As for myself, I'm married, with three boys, and with a wife I met one summer while driving a big ice cream truck from Burlington (University of Vermont), over through the Adirondacks. So my interest in trucks dates back a bit. Look at the luck it brought *me!*

William G. Bogart.

Note from Jim Hendryx

IT CAME with the third instalment of "New Rivers Calling"; it said: Mrs. Hendryx is typing this novel as there are no typists loose in this neck of the woods —I don't mean that there are no loose typists, but that isn't the kind she likes me to employ. I am leaving for Canada to go fishing, and she'll mail you the remainder of the story.

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Blood-Red Cash of Kublai Khan

By WALTER C. BROWN

Author of "Cat Without Whiskers," "The Man Who Cursed the Pearls," etc.

SERGEANT DENNIS O'HARA of the Chinatown Squad climbed the five brownstone steps of No. 17 Paradise Court and knocked on the door. As he waited for a response, he wondered why old Chung Chao had sent for him.

Perhaps the venerable silk merchant's long illness had taken a final turn for the worse—the urgent note delivered to the Precinct office had been in the stiff, angular writing of Meng Tai, Chinatown's famous apothecary-physician.

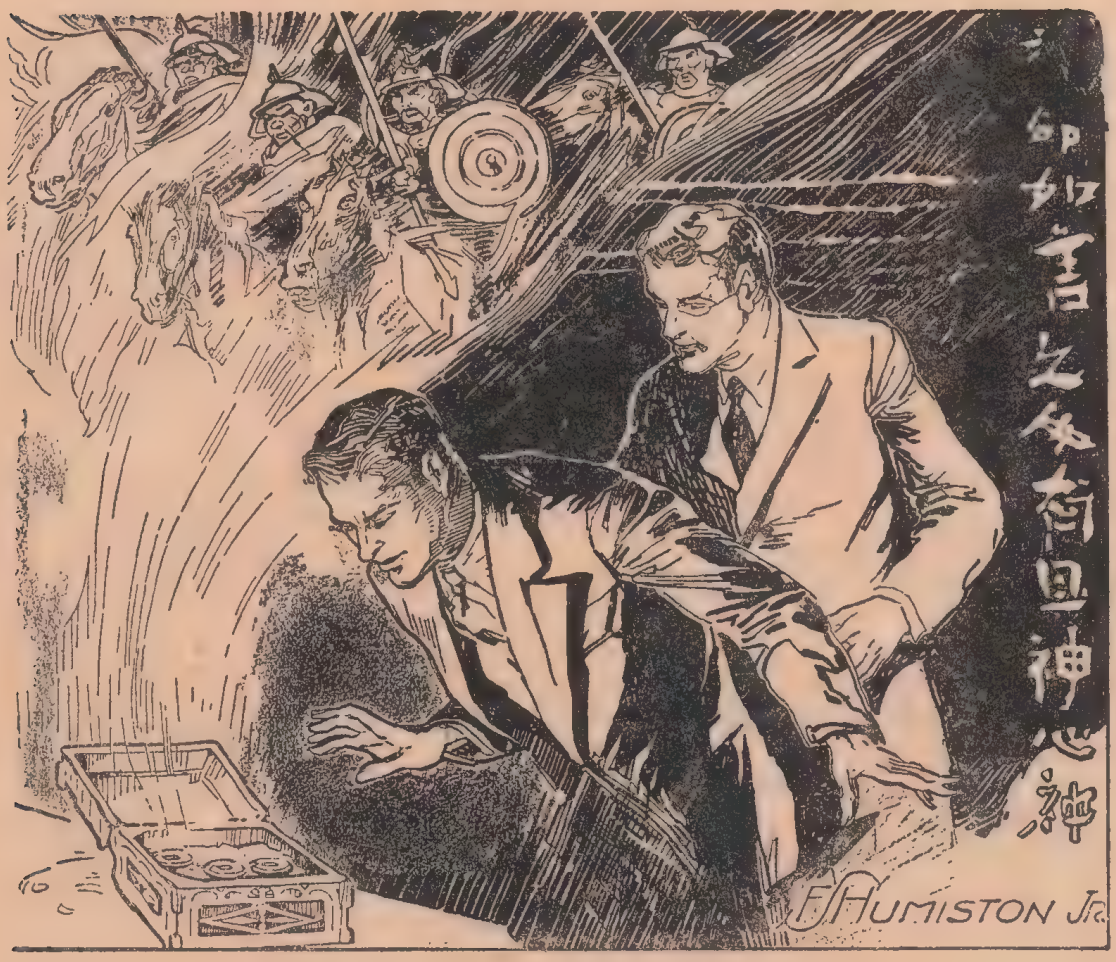
O'Hara stared up at the blank, masked windows of the house and rapped again, harder.

Then he looked at his knuckles, frowning. The pounding had made a peculiarly dull, muffled sound.

"Metal!" O'Hara muttered. "The door's been strengthened inside with iron plates! I wonder what the devil Chung Chao's

10

In Murder—Chinatown Murder—There Is No Such Thing as a Small Point



afraid of, all of a sudden? Must be expecting trouble!"

Although it was common knowledge that the old merchant owned a very valuable collection of Oriental antiques, it was also well known that Chung's art treasures were locked away in a special suite of rooms that had been as strongly fortified as a bank vault.

Then Chang Chao's door swung open on noiseless hinges, and Nang Yat the house-*mafoo* greeted him with a No. 1 bow.

"*Ala wah,* Sah-jin! Master wait for you up-stair."

"*Wah!*" O'Hara replied, and started briskly up the steps. The wall hangings were of plum-colored Shantung silk, and the stairhead was guarded from evil spirits by a pair of life-size *foo* dogs in green stone, with bulging eyes and frozen snarls.

Chung Chao was in the front room, propped up on a sleeping *k'ang* of carved teakwood. Incredibly old and frail, Chung's hollow cheeks and closed, sunken eyes made his face as gaunt and rigid as a death mask.

But the old merchant was not alone. Beside him sat Meng Tai the apothecary, carefully noting his patient's pulse; on the other side of the *k'ang* were two white men.

O'Hara's brows lifted as he recognized the visitors — Detective Winters of Headquarters, and Alexander Bishop, a millionaire collector of Orientalia.

"Well, this *is* a surprise!" O'Hara exclaimed as he greeted the stocky Headquarters man and the tall, gray-haired collector.

Chung Chao roused at the sound of O'Hara's voice. "*Hola,* Sah-jin!" he said weakly, but he smiled and reached out to shake hands.

"*Hola,* Chung Chao!" O'Hara returned heartily. "I hope your health is better?"

The old merchant shook his head. "The years are heavy on my shoulders, Sah-jin. My shadow grows short— But I waste time and words. It is of another matter we must speak—"

"Yes, what goes on?" O'Hara queried. "Why this mysterious gathering? What in thunder brings *you* to Chinatown, Winters?"

"Oh, I'm a sort of consulting expert on this expedition," Winters smiled. "It's really Mr. Bishop's story, so I'll let him give you the details."

CHUNG CHAO nodded. "Hearken, Sah-jin, to the words of *Tajen* Bishop. It is a strange tale he brings to our ears."

"Well, Sergeant," Bishop began briskly, "we're up against a rather peculiar problem, and since it falls in your special bailiwick, we thought you should sit in on the conference. It's a question of theft—"

"Something been stolen from Mr. Chung's collection?" Sergeant O'Hara asked quickly.

"No, Sergeant, nothing's been stolen. At least, not yet! But something particularly valuable *will* be stolen, unless we take extraordinary precautions!"

"Well, that's an unusual angle," Sergeant O'Hara remarked. "Theft with advance notice! Who's going to steal what?"

Mr. Bishop turned to Chung Chao, and the old merchant groped under his pillow. He produced a small silver casket, which he pushed across the silken covers. "Look within, Sah-jin," he invited.

O'Hara lifted the engraved lid, and saw three round pieces of red jade lying in a nest of cotton-wool—three small circles of rare blood-red jade, finely carved, their centers pierced by square holes.

"Hm! Chinese *cash,*" O'Hara said, picking up one of the red disks. "I never saw *cash* made out of jade before. Is that what makes 'em valuable?"

"Valuable!" Bishop gave a brittle laugh. "Sergeant, you're holding a small fortune in your hand! These red jade *cash* are engraved with the personal seal of Kublai Khan! Think of it, O'Hara—Kublai Khan! These three jade *cash* are unique —priceless!"

O'Hara gave a long, low whistle, turning the blood-red disks in his fingers as the millionaire collector went on, eyes glowing, voice vibrant with the fervor of the aroused connoisseur.

"There's always been a legend that the Great Khans had special jade *cash* made for their private purses. A bit of Oriental swank, you know—ordinary coinage not being considered worthy of their exalted touch. But it was only a legend until a few years ago, when Mr. Chung turned up with three of them—*three!*"

O'Hara nodded. "Is it generally known among collectors that Mr. Chung has these rare *cash?*"

"Of course," Bishop answered. "Mr. Chung's had offers from collectors all over the world. I myself have made Mr. Chung a dozen offers, but he has always refused to sell."

"And now somebody wants to steal 'em," O'Hara cut in eagerly. "Let's have all the details about that angle, Mr. Bishop."

"Well, Sergeant, last Tuesday I received a phone call from a man who gave his name as Charles E. Johnstone. He said he was an antiquarian, and asked if I'd be interested in something really rare in Chinese coins—something unique. He was a

smooth talker, very cagey, but finally it came out that what he was offering me was the Kublai *cash!* Of course I knew at once he was dealing in stolen goods. I knew Mr. Chung would never dispose of the *cash* without giving me first chance to bid for them—"

"Just a moment," O'Hara interrupted. "Isn't it possible for other specimens of the Kublai *cash* to turn up?"

"It's extremely unlikely," Bishop replied. "Johnstone warned me that the price would be high, and payment must be all in currency—no checks. I pretended to be greatly interested, and finally Johnstone made an appointment at his hotel, so we could talk the matter over at more length. As soon as he hung up, I called my car and drove down here to see Mr. Chung. But Mr. Chung knew absolutely nothing of the matter, and the Kublai *cash* were safely locked away in his strong-room.

"But that didn't ease my suspicions," Bishop continued. "I'd never heard of any dealer named Charles E. Johnstone, and I know just about everybody in that field. I concluded that there was a plan to steal Mr. Chung's *cash,* and this man Johnstone was trying to arrange a quick disposal of the loot. So I went to Police Headquarters, and Detective Winters here was assigned to the case. He can tell you better than I what happened after that."

"We'd better call it, what *didn't* happen," the Headquarters man said with a wry smile. "Mr. Bishop and I went to Johnstone's hotel. The operator there called Johnstone's room, but there was no answer. He'd slipped out, and of course he didn't come back."

"Naturally!" O'Hara snapped in irritation. "You're too well-known for an assignment like that, Winters. Johnstone was probably watching from the lobby—he saw you enter with Mr. Bishop, and took it on the lam."

"Well, we got this much out of it," Winters replied. "I took the hotel room clerk over to Headquarters to look through our picture files. And who do you think this 'Charles E. Johnstone' turned out to be? None other than Erik Meister!"

O'Hara straightened up alertly. "Meister—the art thief?"

WINTERS pulled a small photograph from his inside pocket and handed it to O'Hara. "Here's his picture, Sergeant. Better study it well, because I think he's going to pay Chinatown a little visit before long."

O'Hara studied the lean face, sharp-eyed and thin-nosed. "It's not a very clear focus," he commented.

"It's the only one we have," Winters declared. "A sneak picture. You see, Meister's not in our official files. He's been picked up any number of times for questioning, but he's so damn slick we've never been able to pin anything on him."

O'Hara turned to the millionaire collector. "Did Meister offer you all three of the *Kublai* cash?"

"No, only one," Bishop replied. "It's quite possible he had already found prospective buyers for the other two. Unfortunately, there are unscrupulous collectors, as well as dishonest dealers."

O'Hara took a last look at the blood-red *cash* of Kublai Khan. Then he closed the silver casket and slid it back across the *k'ang.*

"Sah-jin, you think this No. 1 Rice Thief come here to steal my Kublai *cash?"* Chung Chao asked in a quavering voice, the silver box gripped tightly in his bony hands.

"I wouldn't be surprised," O'Hara replied. "Well, let him try it! He'll learn a few things about Chinatown—the hard way."

"I'm warning you, Sergeant, Meister's as slippery as an eel!" Winters said. "If you're figuring that this is unfamiliar territory for him, just remember Chinatown houses have doors and windows, and that's all Meister needs!"

"We'll be ready for him," O'Hara said

with a grim smile. "I think we can put a nice, big dent in Mr. Erik Meister's perfect record!"

II

SERGEANT O'HARA stood in the darkness of Paradise Court, looking up at the lighted windows on the second floor of No. 17—Chung Chao's house. He smiled with satisfaction as he cracked a leechee nut and ate the spicy brown fruit.

A full week had passed since his conference with old Chung, Mr. Bishop, and Detective Winters, and the priceless red jade *cash* of Kublai Khan still reposed safely in Chung's strong rooms—safe behind iron-barred windows and a metal-lined door secured by three separate locks.

Every night now Nang Yat the *mafoo* made his bed outside the locked door of the treasure rooms, but O'Hara's confidence was not based alone on the curved knife whose handle projected from the servant's belt, nor even on the revolver which was hidden under Chung Chao's pillow.

Let Erik Meister choose the darkest midnight hour, when all lights were extinguished in No. 17 Paradise Court—let the master-thief make an entry so noiseless that both Nang Yat and Chung Chao slept on—he would find the darkness only a trap, the silence a snare.

For there was now a third Oriental in the house—a fighting Cantonese named Sang Lum, chosen by Sergeant O'Hara himself, and secreted in No. 17 under cover of darkness.

This Sang Lum slept by day, keeping out of sight in a room on the top floor, but all night long he kept noiseless watch, sitting cross-legged in the darkness of Chung Chao's chamber, ears alert for the faintest sound. And Sang Lum kept the windows raised a few inches, for he was armed, not with knife or pistol, but with a police whistle!

So Sergeant O'Hara grinned into the darkness of Paradise Court, quite satisfied with his arrangements, and said half-aloud, "All right, Meister, come and get it!"

Then O'Hara turned away and continued on his customary eleven o'clock rounds. The sky overhead was sullen, the wind rising, and he wondered if the gathering storm would break before he returned to the Precinct.

As he passed along Mulberry Lane, the Chinese war bulletins tacked to the side wall of Long Jon's Tea House rattled and crackled in the gusty wind. O'Hara pulled his hat tighter and increased his pace along the familiar route, past the gilded doorway of the Tsin Tien Tong-house, the pine-boarded ruins of the Old China Theater.

In Half Moon Street the uneasy wind stirred the maple trees into a noise like snickering laughter, and the rusty hinges of the creaking sign went "eek—aw . . . eeek—aw" with maddening persistence.

O'Hara turned into Lantern Court, dark and deserted. Only one window there was still alight, where a lonely musician dragged a tuneless Oriental ditty from a squeaking moon-fiddle.

"If that Chink fiddler'd team up with the rusty sign, they'd have a swell duet," O'Hara grinned to himself as he moved on into the dark opening of Long Sword Alley.

Then his ears caught the swift pad-pad of slippered feet running toward him, and he stopped in his tracks as a round-hatted little Chinaman in a dark blue *shaam* loomed up out of the shadowy passage, giving a startled squeak as O'Hara's solid bulk suddenly blocked his path.

"What's your hurry?" O'Hara demanded, catching the Oriental by the arm and swinging him around into the light of the single gas-lamp. "Well, if it isn't my old friend Quam Lee the coffin-maker! Not out on a hurry-up business call, I hope?" the sergeant added grimly.

"Sah-jin! Tao in his wisdom makes our paths to meet!" Quam Lee gasped. "Come chop-chop to Paradise Court! Plenty No. 1

trouble waits at house of Chung Chao, the man of wealth!"

"Chung Chao!" O'Hara exclaimed. "What kind of trouble? I passed there a little while ago, and everything was all right."

"Sah-jin, as I walk through Paradise Court I hear a door swing boom-boom-boom in the wind. It is Chung Chao's door which stands open. There is a light within—but no one comes to stop the noisy door!"

"Well, didn't you go inside?" O'Hara demanded. "Didn't you try to see what's wrong?"

"Yes, Sah-jin, I go in hall. I call out Chung Chao's name in a loud voice. Then I call out for Nang Yat the *mafoo*. They make no answer! I hear nothing but door going boom-boom-boom when wind blows. So I run out of house chop-chop to bring word to pohliss."

O'Hara straightened up. "All right, Quam Lee, come along!"

Side by side the little Chinaman and the tall, red-haired "Sah-jin" hurried toward Paradise Court, and O'Hara's swift glance sought out the upper windows of No. 17. The lights in Chung Chao's chamber were still on. Then the wind came with a swooping rush, and for a brief moment Chung's doorway stood outlined in pale yellow light, until the derelict door banged shut again with a dull, rumbling *boom*.

Twice more it banged to and fro before they reached the brownstone steps, and there was something eerie and foreboding in the sound that pricked Sergeant O'Hara's nerves as he stepped across the silent threshold and opened the inner vestibule door.

The hall was silent and deserted, but a lacquer tray lay overturned and the broken pieces of a blue-glaze teapot were scattered across the floor near the foot of the stairs.

"Chung! Chung Chao!" O'Hara shouted up the dark stair-well.

There was no answer. The house was silent as a Ming tomb. Outside, the wind stirred again, and snaky ripples ran along the plum-silk wall hangings. "Must be a window open somewhere," O'Hara muttered.

"Sah-jin!" Quam Lee whispered nervously. "I hear noise—back there!" He pointed a shaking finger toward the dark passage which led to the kitchen.

O'Hara nodded, listening to the sound—a dull thumping. Switching on his electric torch, he moved forward, his thumb flicking back the safety catch of his .38. The bright cone of light circled the dark kitchen, hovered around a window standing wide open to the breeze, and then focused on a figure writhing and twisting on the floor. It was Nang Yat the *mafoo*, bound hand and foot, making strangled noises through a kitchen towel tied across his mouth.

The lights blazed on as O'Hara's fingers found the wall switch. He bent down swiftly over the wriggling servant, ripping away the twisted gag, slashing at the knotted cords.

"What in hell happened?" he demanded,, shaking the gasping *mafoo*. "Come on—speak up!"

"Sah-jin!" Nang Yat moaned. "He come here tonight—the No. 1 Rice Face Thief! *Ai-yee!* He spring out at me like hungry tiger as I carry tea to Master. He hold me tight by throat—he hit me on head." The *mafoo* felt his head tenderly. "*Hoya*, how he is strong—and quick!"

"How long ago was this?" O'Hara snapped.

"Not know, Sah-jin," the *mafoo* wailed. "When he hit me I fall down in black sleep—I know nothing till I wake up, tied with ropes like a pig for the markets. *Ai-yee*, I did not have time even to cry out in warning to Master!"

O'Hara's thoughts moved rapidly. Meister's quick hand might have choked Nang Yat into silence, but the *mafoo* had dropped the tea-tray when attacked, and

the crash must have been heard upstairs. Why, then, hadn't Chung Chao fired his pistol? Why hadn't Sang Lum blown his police whistle?

GUN in hand, O'Hara raced up the staircase. The long upper hall was dim and shadowy, but a narrow wedge of light shone through the partly opened door of the front room. O'Hara approached the lighted crack cautiously. For a moment he peered into the room, then with a half-smothered exclamation he flung the door wide.

Old Chung Chao lay stretched out on the silk-draped *k'ang*, eyes closed, as if asleep.

Near him, in a massive guest chair, sat Meng Tai the apothecary, head bowed so that his fat chins rested on his chest. And on the other side of the room, Sang Lum, the night guard, sat crosslegged on the floor, leaning back against the wall, his head drooping toward his left shoulder.

"What in hell is this!" O'Hara exploded, staring at the three Orientals, so motionless and so silent.

"*Ai-yee,* they are all dead!" the *mafoo* wailed shrilly from behind him. "The Rice Face Thief has killed them."

"Shut up!" O'Hara snapped. He bent over Chung Chao's still figure, but he could see no visible wound, no blood, no sign of violence. He rested his fingers over the old merchant's heart, felt his wrist for the pulse, then turned back one of the slanted yellow eyelids.

O'Hara repeated the performance with the inert forms of Meng Tai and Sang Lum, then straightened up, grim-lipped. "They've been drugged!" he announced crisply. "Quam Lee, run as fast as you can to the Precinct—tell them to send a doctor chop-chop."

"Can do!" Quam answered, and sped away on his errand.

"*Ai-yee,* Sah-jin!" Nang Yat moaned. "Rice Face Thief is truly a No. 1 devil. He break strong-room door and steal Kublai *cash* from Master! Come for look-see—"

O'Hara strode down the hall to Chung's strong rooms, pushing open the badly battered door and turning on the lights.

"Don't touch anything," O'Hara warned the *mafoo.* "There may be fingerprints."

The first room was given over to antique bronzes and a fine collection of ancient Chinese weapons, from small Han knives to a mounted suit of Manchu armor standing beside the door like a sinister sentry. The inner room held valuable porcelains and jades, with Chung Chao's famed collection of ancient Chinese currency ranged on the open shelves of an enormous teakwood cabinet.

O'Hara jerked out a startled exclamation, and a quick gleam of hope came into his eyes, as he saw the familiar engraved silver casket of the priceless Kublai *cash* still reposing in its usual place.

But the casket was empty.

"Meister!" O'Hara swore softly but fervently, as he let the lid fall back into place with a metallic clatter.

III

DR. STANAGE, the police surgeon, bent over the still form of old Chung Chao on his silk-draped *k'ang.* Shaking his head, he detached the twin tentacles of the stethoscope from his ears. "Too late, Sergeant. He's gone—been dead about an hour, I'd say."

"That's what I was afraid of," O'Hara said. "I examined him before you arrived, and I couldn't detect any pulse or heart action. Well, that leaves a murder charge hanging over Erik Meister's head—first-degree murder!"

O'Hara looked down at the other two unconscious victims—Meng Tai the apothecary and Sang Lum the night-watcher—ranged side by side on extra bedding spread across the floor.

"Will these other two be all right?" he queried.

"Yes," Dr. Stanage declared. "They're in no particular danger now. It'll take some hours for them to sleep off the effects of the drug. But Chung Chao was too old and frail—in his weakened condition he couldn't weather the shock of a stiff dose of opiate."

"What kind of opiate was it?" O'Hara asked.

"I'd only be guessing, Sergeant, till I've analyzed the dregs in these tea-cups," Dr. Stanage replied, waving toward the three porcelain cups which O'Hara had carefully collected and put aside as evidence.

"But there's no doubt the drug was administered in their tea?"

"It was in the tea," Dr. Stanage confirmed. "I've tasted a drop out of each cup. I can't understand why they didn't notice the bitter taste."

"The Chinese don't sip their tea. They gulp it down, scalding hot," O'Hara explained, as Dr. Stanage took three small glass phials from his medical kit and carefully transferred the tea dregs from the three porcelain cups.

"Drugged!" O'Hara muttered savagely, descending the stairs. "Meister sure had the devil at his elbow, picking out the only loophole we hadn't blocked up!"

Quam Lee the coffin-maker was sitting on the bottom step, conversing in Cantonese with Nang Yat while the latter was busy sweeping up the smashed pieces of the blue teapot.

"What news of Master, Sah-jin?" the *mafoo* inquired anxiously.

"Chung Chao is dead!" O'Hara replied.

Quam Lee let out a wailing cry at the news, but Nang Yat stood silent, head bowed. Then he sank slowly to his knees, fumbling in some inner recess of his *shaam* for his prayer blocks. The carved prayer bones made a clicking noise as he passed them rapidly from one hand to the other, to and fro, to and fro.

O'Hara stepped past him and joined Officer Driscoll, who was making a careful examination of the front door.

"Find anything interesting?" O'Hara asked.

"Well, Sarge," Driscoll replied, "this door wasn't jimmied open from the outside. It kept banging in the wind because somebody turned the lever bolt while the door was open. It couldn't close again, that way. Sounds like a screwy thing to do, but it must have been done on purpose."

"Yes," O'Hara nodded. "And I think I know why Meister left the door banging. He'd be worried about the drugged men upstairs—afraid he'd given them an overdose. He'd want them to get medical attention as soon as possible after he left. You see, Meister's specialty is theft—the last thing he'd want is to ring up a murder rap against himself."

Driscoll swung the door to and fro. "The lock's busted now, Sarge. We'll have to wedge the door shut to keep it from banging."

"Okay, jam it good and tight," O'Hara directed. "Then go on up to the strong-rooms and dust around with your powder-gun. Maybe we can pick up a good set of Meister's fingerprints."

"Meister's too smart for that, Sarge," Driscoll predicted.

O'Hara went on back through the house to the kitchen, where Officer Burke was running his flashlight beam over the frame of the window looking out on Chung Chao's walled garden.

"Driscoll says the front door wasn't jimmied," O'Hara declared, "so it looks like Meister made his entry through this window. It was wide open when I arrived. Any marks on it?"

Burke shook his head. "There's no sign of tampering, Sarge, but if the catch wasn't on, it'd be a cinch to open it from outside and climb in over the sill without leaving any traces."

"How about the garden wall?" O'Hara queried.

"Seven feet high," Burke replied, "but it's rough stone, easy to climb over. If

Meister left any footprints out there in the garden, they're washed out now, with this pouring rain. Just listen to it! Meister's even got the weather working for him."

O'Hara stood listening to the swift drumming of the rain on the kitchen roof. Nang Yat's copper tea-kettle still simmered gently over one of the burners on the stove.

"If Meister hid outside this window," O'Hara said slowly, "he could easily reach in and drop his dope into the teapot when Nang Yat wasn't looking. Then when the *mafoo* went upstairs with the drugged tea, he climbed in and hid in the front room—"

Nang Yat came into the kitchen to throw the broken tea-pot into the trash can.

"Nang," O'Hara asked, "was this window open while you were making the tea?"

"Yes, Sah-jin, open so much," the *mafoo* replied, holding his hands about a foot apart.

"And while you were making the tea," O'Hara pursued, "did you stand here at the stove all the time?"

"No, Sah-jin, I walk in and out—fetch tray—fetch cups."

Nang Yat repeated his account of the night's happenings, step by step. The pot of tea was a nightly custom with old Chung Chao. The *mafoo* had carried it upstairs at the appointed time, and the old merchant had ordered an extra pot prepared. Nang Yet had been carrying this second serving of tea to his master when Meister had ambushed him.

"And you're sure this is the man who attacked you in the hall?" O'Hara asked, holding out the picture of Eric Meister.

"Yes, it look like him, Sah-jin," Nang Yat declared. "Rice Face Devil!" he added fiercely, spitting over his left shoulder and making a quick "finger curse."

O'Hara asked many more questions, but added nothing significant to his knowledge. Nang Yat, lying bound and gagged in the kitchen, had heard only dull thuds as the thief forced his way into Chung Chao's strong-rooms. Then a long silence.

"You didn't see Meister again?" O'Hara queried. "You didn't even hear him leave the house?"

"No, Sah-jin," the *mafoo* replied. "I hear nothing for long time, until front door begin to bang in wind. Quam Lee come then, and call upstair. I try to make noise with feet, but he not hear me—he run away chop-chop."

"Well, let's go up and have another look at the strong-room," O'Hara suggested, and they followed him up the stairs.

The door of the treasure-room was heavily reinforced with iron plating, and the old merchant had had the extra locks inserted, but the thief had gouged and wrenched and hacked at the door until the jamb had given way.

"Meister sure made a mess of the door," Burke remarked. "He must have used a jimmy big as a crowbar."

"I guess he was in a hurry," O'Hara commented. "He probably lost a lot of time trying to find Chung's keys."

"You hunt for Master's keys?" Nang Yat interrupted. "Me catch."

The *mafoo* hurried into Chung Chao's room and returned with a small, yellow-glaze statuette of the Belly God. A sharp twist, and the grinning head pulled out like a cork from a bottle. Within the hollow body lay a wad of cotton, and as Nang Yat shook the wad, the keys to the strong-room door dropped into O'Hara's palm.

"No wonder Meister couldn't find them!" Burke exclaimed. "When a Chinaman hides something, he *hides* it, and no foolin'."

O'Hara went on into the treasure rooms, looking at the splotches of gray and white powder where Driscoll had sprayed for fingerprints.

"Catch anything that looks good?" O'Hara asked.

"Nothing but smudges," Driscoll replied disgustedly. "Here's this silver casket, for instance—the one thing in these rooms we *know* Meister must have handled—and it's a total washout."

"I've been wondering about that casket," O'Hara replied. "It seems rather queer Meister should bother picking out the *cash* and leave the box behind. The natural thing would've been to grab casket and all, and stick it in his pocket."

"It's a small point, Sarge," Burke suggested.

"In a murder case, there's no such thing as a *small* point!" O'Hara replied sharply, and the truth of the sergeant's dictum was made plain a few minutes later. Interrupted by a brisk rapping at the front door, Officer Burke went down to answer, and returned round-eyed with surprise.

"It's Lee Shu the banker, Sarge," he announced, and stood aside for the lean, shrewd-eyed Oriental who was accounted Chinatown's richest man. Lee Shu, as always, was clothed entirely in black, from his round black hat to his black satin Canton slippers.

"*Ala wah,* Sah-jin," Lee Shu greeted O'Hara. "It is being whispered through the streets that my old friend Chung Chao has been hurried to his honorable ancestors by a deed of violence. Are these words of truth, Sah-jin?"

"Unfortunately—yes," O'Hara replied, and gave the stern-faced Chinese banker a brief account of the tragic happenings. "Apparently the thief did not seek Chung Chao's life. He came to steal the famous Kublai *cash,* and, so far as we can tell, he didn't touch anything else in Chung Chao's collection."

"But, Sah-jin, the Kublai *cash* have *not* been stolen!" Lee Shu declared in even tones.

"What! Not stolen? Why, they're gone—"

"For the past five days, Sah-jin," Lee Shu continued calmly, "the Kublai *cash* have been safely locked away in my iron money-vault! Chung Chao sent for me and told me that he feared thieves were planning to steal his priceless jade *cash.* He gave them into my keeping, secretly, so no one else would know!"

And in the midst of astounded silence Lee Shu produced a curiously knotted square of yellow silk. His lean fingers worked swiftly and expertly—the shimmering folds fell open, revealing the three blood-red *cash* of Kublai Khan!

"Well, I'll be damned!" O'Hara said slowly.

IV

GLANCING out the front window of Chung Chao's house, O'Hara saw a car pulling up outside in Paradise Court. He recognized the big black limousine as Alexander Bishop's car, even before the uniformed chauffeur sprang out and held the door for the millionaire collector.

As Bishop crossed the pavement, he paused a moment to study the two scroll-like signs which hung on either side of the door—one lettered in English, the other in Chinese "broken stick" writing—announcing a five-day exhibition of the departed Chung Chao's collection of Oriental antiques prior to their sale by public auction.

Then the gray-haired collector mounted the outer steps and entered, glancing curiously at the wooden-faced Oriental who stood on guard at the open door.

"Hello, Mr. Bishop," O'Hara greeted, advancing to meet him in the vestibule. "I

thought you'd be dropping in, just to make sure the Kublai *cash* are still safe."

"Well, after all that happened last week, I couldn't help worrying a little," Bishop confessed.

"Then rest easy," O'Hara smiled. "They are guarded like the crown jewels. Watch, and you'll see what I mean—" and turning toward the staircase, he called out a sharp *"Hai!"*

As if by magic, a wary-eyed Oriental appeared at the back of the downstairs hall, and another on the landing above, swift and silent as blue-clad ghosts, their hands buried in their wide sleeves.

O'Hara spoke to them briefly in crackling Cantonese—the two Orientals vanished as quickly and silently as they had appeared.

"Who were they, Sergeant?" Bishop asked. "I must say they didn't look very friendly."

"They're not," O'Hara replied. "They are part of a picked guard from the Tsin Tien Tong. Lee Shu the banker sent them over here to keep watch on Chung's collection."

"And I suppose your own men keep watch on the watchers?" Bishop smiled.

"No, I haven't any men assigned to this," O'Hara replied. "I offered our services to Lee Shu, but he turned me down cold. I can't do anything about that, because Chung Chao's will named Lee Shu as sole executor, with full power to handle all details. So the safety of the Kublai *cash* is now Lee Shu's responsibility. What I'm hanging around here for is to get my hands on Erik Meister."

"Meister!" Bishop exclaimed. "You don't think he'd be crazy enough to make a second attempt to steal the *cash!*"

"Why not?" O'Hara countered. "According to his record, Meister's the daredevil type, the kind of crook who gets a big kick out of beating the odds. Consider his first attempt. Chung Chao's private catalog listed 683 items in the strongroom. But when we checked them, nothing was missing—not a thing! Any other crook would have carried away a load of some kind of loot, just as a consolation prize. But not Meister! Oh, no! He came for the Kublai *cash,* and nothing else will do. That's why I have a hunch he'll be back for another try!"

Bishop shook his head. "It sounds like sheer madness to me. He'd simply be running his head into a noose."

"That's what I thought the first time," O'Hara said grimly, "and Meister went right ahead and made a monkey out of me. I've been here twenty-four hours a day since the public exhibition started. I eat here—I sleep here—and I'm not leaving this house till after the sale next Monday."

"But surely you don't expect Meister to walk in here in broad daylight?" Bishop laughed. "I know you kept his name out of the newspaper reports of Chung Chao's death, but that wouldn't fool a man like Meister."

"I think Meister would take a chance—disguised, of course," O'Hara replied. "There have been over five hundred visitors so far—collectors, dealers, students, college professors — white men, yellow men, even a Hindu in a turban! Nobody gets up these stairs without being looked over."

Bishop nodded, smiling. "You're certainly thorough, Sergeant. Bloodhound of the Law is no idle phrase with you, is it?"

O'Hara frowned. "Well, this is more than just another murder case. We had advance warning, yet we failed to save Chung Chao. It's a serious matter for the Squad to 'lose face' in Chinatown. Shall we go up and have a look at those priceless *cash?"*

They went up the stairs, past the frozen snarls of the green stone *foo* dogs, past the impassive stare of the silent tongster who stood guard at the entrance to Chung Chao's treasure-rooms.

From the doorway, this tongster kept his eye on the dynasty bronzes and antique

weapons which crowded cabinet shelves and lined the walls of the outer room. And in the inner room, watching over Chung's precious porcelains, ivories and jades was a hawk-eyed Oriental with a pockmarked face and the haughty bearing of a red-button mandarin.

"That's Moy Kee, the Captain of the Tsin Tien guard," O'Hara whispered. "He's Chinatown's best knife-man. They say he can stand thirty feet from a lighted candle and slice off the flame at the first throw. The Kublai *cash* are in that display cabinet between the windows. They're kept under glass, so no one can handle them, and they're never out of Moy Kee's sight."

Bishop moved eagerly toward the little straight-legged cabinet, peering down through the plate-glass cover at the priceless disks of blood-red jade, nestling below in a bed of snowy cotton.

"How much do you think the Kublai *cash* will bring at the sale?" O'Hara inquired.

Bishop shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine, Sergeant. I intend to buy them in for my collection, but I expect stiff opposition. However, it's for a good cause. According to Chung Chao's will, all the money from the sale of his estate goes to the China War Fund, doesn't it?"

"Every single penny of it," O'Hara replied. "Old Chung was wrapped up heart and soul in the misfortunes of his native country. Every day he burned prayers for the success of Chiang Kai-shek's armies. Why, he didn't even leave a cash bequest for Nang Yat, his *mafoo,* who'd been with him for years."

THEN Alexander Bishop left in his shining black limousine, and silence descended upon the house of Chung Chao. At the customary tea-hour, Nang Yat the *mafoo* appeared, bowing, with his newly acquired assistant, Wing Poh, carrying a huge tray laden with steaming cups of *lung ching* sprinkled with jasmine buds.

"Keeps you pretty busy, Nang, looking after this Tsin Tien crowd, night and day?" O'Hara remarked.

"Wing Poh help me with kitchen work," Nang Yat replied. "Also, it is much better that many eyes keep watch." The *mafoo* lowered his voice to a whisper. "Three times today I cast my prayer blocks, and always the sign of bad luck come topside. The Lords of Destiny give warning, Sah-jin — there are devil-dragons in the sky!"

O'Hara listened with a tolerant smile, but nevertheless there was something rather impressive in the somber earnestness of the *mafoo's* superstitious warning.

Later on, Kim Yao the goldsmith of Mulberry Lane dropped in and chattered volubly over a Kwan Yin statuette in rose quartz on which he had set his pagan heart.

Two students from the City Art Institute asked permission to make crayon sketches of a certain Kang-hsi vase.

Time moved on, slowly but steadily, like the measured drip-drip of a Canton water-clock, but O'Hara's mind, restless and alert, always returned to one absorbing question—Erik Meister. Mentally he put himself in Meister's shoes. If *he* were the master-thief, how would he set about stealing the Kublai *cash?* How was it possible to outwit the ring of bolts and bars and watchful eyes that guarded those priceless red jade disks every moment of the day and night?

"I give up!" O'Hara growled. "I guess I haven't the makings for even a second-rate crook."

AS a taxicab pulled up outside, a somewhat elderly, stoop-shouldered man got out. He wore an old-fashioned frock coat, a wing collar with a knitted black tie, and great round horn-rim glasses.

"Another professor!" O'Hara murmured.

The stoop-shouldered man entered, peering about owlishly. "Good day, sir!"

he greeted O'Hara with precise politeness. "Can you direct me to the exhibit rooms?"

"Up the stairs—straight on along the hall," O'Hara replied.

"Thank you. My card, sir."

O'Hara glanced at the visiting card which had been offered with old-fashioned formality. "J. Bertram Chandler, M. A., Ph. D." he read, and in the lower left corner: "Assistant Curator—Anglo-Orient Foundation."

"I am told there are some very fine Ming porcelains in the Chung collection," Dr. Chandler remarked. "I have been instructed to bid on them for the Foundation, but I'm afraid our funds are rather too limited."

"Yes, Ming stuff comes high," O'Hara replied politely, handing him a catalog from the pile on a camphorwood chest. "But the real bidding will come when Item 369 goes under the hammer. That's the star number in this collection."

Dr. Chandler opened the catalog to Item 369, adjusted his glasses and read the lengthy paragraph devoted to the three Kublai *cash*. "Very interesting," he said, nodding. "Yes—very interesting indeed. They are of great historical value."

Glancing at his wrist-watch, Dr. Chandler started up the staircase. But he had no sooner turned his back than a remarkable change came over O'Hara's face. The sergeant's eyes narrowed, and he found himself following impulsively before he checked himself.

"*Meister*—or I'm a Chinaman!" O'Hara muttered tensely.

V

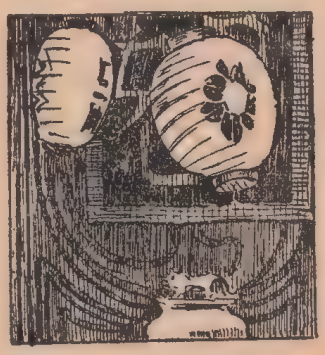
DIPPING into his pockets, Sergeant O'Hara pulled out the Headquarters' snapshot of Erik Meister. There was little surface resemblance between the sharp-featured master-thief and the scholarly "Dr. Chandler" now calmly mounting the stairs, but on the back of the photograph Detective Winters had left a penciled notation: "Meister has white burn-scar approximate size of quarter above right wrist."

Dr. Chandler had reached the stairhead and was disappearing from sight along the upper hall. O'Hara beckoned swiftly to the silent Tsin Tien guard at the front door.

"You saw that tall man who just went upstairs?" O'Hara asked in a taut whisper. "Don't let him out of here again! Lock that door and stand with your back against it till further orders! Savvy?"

"*Wah!*" the yellow man answered softly, an alert flicker in his black eyes. "He is the No. 1 Rice Face Thief, yiss?"

"That's what I want to find out!" Sergeant O'Hara replied crisply, and moved swiftly and silently up the stairs. He paused outside the treasure-room doorway and looked in cautiously for a more detailed scrutiny of his intended quarry.



Dr. Chandler was moving slowly around the rooms, catalogue in hand, pausing now and then to examine an item which caught his fancy. O'Hara waited grimly as the leisurely tour brought him nearer and nearer to the cabinet which held the Kublai *cash*.

But Dr. Chandler merely glanced down through the plate-glass top at the priceless jade disks and then passed on. If he were nervous over the risk he ran in returning to the scene of his first disastrous attempt to steal the Kublai *cash*, he gave no sign of it. Not once did he even so much as glance over his shoulder.

"Cast-iron nerves!" O'Hara muttered.

Dr. Chandler was now looking over the collection of antique weapons. He stopped before an ivory-hilted long-sword, studying the faded inscription along the ancient blade.

Treading softly as a cat, O'Hara walked up from behind. "Well, Meister," he said in a level voice, "I thought you'd take a longer look at the Kublai *cash!*"

Dr. Chandler whirled around with a gasp of astonishment. "Meister?" he echoed in puzzled tones. "That's not my name, sir. You've made a mistake—"

"I don't think so!" O'Hara snapped. "I admire your nerve, Meister, trying to 'case' this job right under my nose! But I've been expecting you. I figured you'd be back for a second try."

The stoop-shouldered man straightened up. "My dear sir, I have no idea what you're talking about."

O'Hara laughed. "Let's not waste time kidding. That's a damn good disguise, Meister, but the wrist-watch is a little out of character. And why is it on your *right* wrist, with an extra wide strap? You wouldn't be trying to cover up a scar, would you?"

"Certainly not!" Dr. Chandler replied indignantly, holding out his right arm. "Remove the watch, sir! See for yourself if I have a scar—"

Surprised by this confident challenge, O'Hara's vigilance relaxed for an unlucky half-second. The moment that his hands touched that proffered right sleeve, Dr. Chandler's left fist swung upward in a swift arc that landed flush on the sergeant's jaw.

O'Hara's head bobbed under the impact; with blind instinct he lunged forward to grapple with the treacherous enemy. But Dr. Chandler was no longer the meek-mannered, stoop-shouldered scholar. With his owlish glasses flung aside he stood revealed, lithe and lean and dangerous in his cold-eyed fury.

A treacherous knee jolted O'Hara full in the stomach, doubling him over, gasping—Meister's fists smashed at the sergeant's face, left, right, left, until he swayed and went down on one knee, half-dazed by the sudden, vicious battering.

"Grab him!" O'Hara gasped as he saw Meister turn and jump for the doorway.

"Hai!" the slant-eyed guard shouted, and whipped out a curved knife as he blocked the exit. But Meister seized the tongster's knife-arm and with a lightning *judo* twist sent the yellow man flying head over heels in a complete somersault.

However, swift as Meister's victory over the tongster had been, it had given O'Hara time to shake off the effects of that first brutal onslaught. With the red light of battle in his eyes, the sergeant made a diving tackle and swept the master-thief's legs from under him.

Snarling and spitting like a cornered beast, Meister kicked loose and bounded to his feet, only to have O'Hara catch him by the ankles and bring him down again with a crash that shook the walls.

On even terms, then, the two men grappled with a primal fury that asked no quarter and gave none. A teakwood stand went over with a crash—a bamboo screen collapsed and was trampled underfoot—a bronze urn tottered from its pedestal and struck the floor with a deep, bell-like clang.

O'Hara, straining to pin down those flailing arms, knew the battle was already won. For even if the master-thief broke loose now, he had no chance of escape. Moy Kee had reached the gong which hung in the inner room and struck a warning crash—footsteps of hurrying tongsters were loud on the stairs.

"Give up, you damned fool!" O'Hara gasped. "Don't you see what's waiting for you?"

Meister glanced at the grim figure of Moy Kee framed in the inner doorway, ready to hurl his flying steel at the first opportunity. And at the outer door the tumbled tongster crouched, beady-eyed

and vengeful, clutching his crooked knife.

"Go to hell, copper!" Meister snarled, redoubling his efforts to shake off the sergeant's grip. A jolting uppercut got in past O'Hara's guard, and Meister seized the chance to twist loose. But as he jerked backward with all his force he crashed headlong against the wall, and before he could recover his balance, O'Hara lashed out with a perfectly timed right hook.

The force of the blow spun Meister almost completely around, his knees sagging, his eyes turning glassy. Then with his arms making a vague, groping motion, he collapsed to the floor, face down.

"What a wildcat!" O'Hara gasped, drawing in deep breaths. *"Now* we'll see what's under that wrist-watch!" He bent down, loosened the leather strap, and smiled grimly at sight of a puckered white scar—smiled and snapped a pair of handcuffs on Meister's wrists.

"Hai! Hai!" the Tsin Tien guards chanted gleefully, crowding around the prostrate prisoner. "Rice Face Thief go now to stone *yamen!* Rice Face Thief will die for death of Chung Chao! *Hai!"*

"All right—break it up!" O'Hara silenced the jubilant tongsters. "Moy Kee, see if you can straighten up the mess in here. Nang Yat, give me a hand—I think Meister's hurt. We'd better carry him into the front room."

"Not good, Sah-jin, to put him in Chung Chao's room," the *mafoo* protested. "Ghost-spirit of Master Chung not like. Bring him my room, put him on my *k'ang*. I not care."

"Okay," O'Hara said, and lifting Meister, they carried him into Nang Yat's room across the hall, and stretched him out on the *mafoo's* cot.

"He feel heavy like dead man," Nang Yat remarked.

"No, he's alive all right," O'Hara declared. "Might have a concussion, though, from the way his head struck the wall."

A quick search of Meister's pockets yielded only a handful of coins, a key-ring, a handkerchief, and a wallet with a few bills and a half dozen calling cards of "J. Bertram Chandler, M. A., Ph. D."

"Not even a gun on him," O'Hara muttered as he went downstairs, and opening the front door, blew the emergency call on his police whistle—three short blasts, one long. An answering call came from Mulberry Lane, and presently a red patrol car rolled into Paradise Court.

"We've got Meister!" O'Hara called as the car halted in front of No. 17. "Tell the precinct to send the wagon. And make it snappy—Meister looks like a hospital case."

The red car started off, and O'Hara went back inside. Nang Yat came hurrying down the stairs with a basin of water in his hand and some towels draped over his arm.

"You bleed on face, Sah-jin," the *mafoo* said. "You sit down, I fix chop-chop."

O'Hara touched his chin and found a wet smear of blood on his hand. "It's only a cut lip," he declared, sitting on the stairs while Nang Yat wiped the blood from his mouth and chin.

"It bleed worse now," the *mafoo* said. "I bring cold water to make stop."

Nang Yat brought a bowl of cold water from the kitchen, and O'Hara was holding a wet towel over the cut, when the sudden crash and jangle of breaking glass brought him to his feet.

"What's that!" he exploded. "It's upstairs! Sounds like it came from Meister's room!"

Flinging the towel aside, O'Hara raced up the stairs. The Tsin Tien guards were already milling about in the hall, pointing excitedly to the door of Nang Yat's room.

"Big noise come from inside, Sah-jin!" Moy Kee shrilled. "But door lock tight!"

O'Hara pushed the tongsters aside and wrenched at the locked door. Then he drew back and drove his shoulder against the panels.

At the third jolting assault the lock

gave way and the door burst open. A broken chair lay on the floor beneath the shattered window—but the room was empty. Meister had vanished!

VI

"HERE'S what I don't get, Sarge," Officer Driscoll said, looking at the broken window in Nang Yat's room. "Why would Meister *smash* his way out? Broken glass makes a terrific racket. Why didn't he just raise the window and sneak out over the roof?"

"Use your eyes!" O'Hara snapped. "Can't you see the window's nailed down? Nang Yat says it's been nailed down ever since a burglar tried to break in here a couple of years ago."

O'Hara plucked a piece of glass from the broken window-frame and threw it angrily against the wall. "What in hell are we up against, anyway? I'd swear Meister was out cold when we brought him in here. He was so limp Nang Yat thought he was dead!"

"Maybe he was hurt, Sarge," Driscoll said, "but it's a cinch he couldn't have been knocked cold. He was smart enough to lie still and play doggo, waiting for you to turn your back."

"All right, say he foxed me," O'Hara countered angrily, "but how in blazes did he make a get-away? A white man, racing through Chinatown—handcuffed—and nobody sees him! And it's not only the Chinatown Squad—every cop in the city's on the lookout for him."

"Maybe he got rid of the handcuffs," Driscoll suggested. "From what we've seen of him, Meister's got more tricks up his sleeve than a card sharp."

O'Hara stared at the detective for a moment. "Yes, why not?" he muttered. "With Meister, anything is possible." Then he moved briskly to the door and shouted "Hey! Tell Wing Poh to come up here!"

Nang Yat's kitchen assistant made a prompt appearance, and O'Hara said, "Wing Poh, you were in the kitchen when Meister escaped. Let's have your story over again."

Wing Poh made a polite bow. "Sah-jin, I am washing dish for Nang Yat. I hear loud noise when glass break upstair. Then I hear quick footstep on kitchen roof. I look through window and see Rice Face Thief make jump from kitchen roof to garden wall. Then he jump down on other side of wall and is gone."

"Okay," O'Hara said. "Now tell me this, Wing — did Meister have handcuffs on?"

The yellow man was silent a moment, turning the question over in his mind. Then his eyes brightened. "No, Sah-jin, the Rice Face have free hands. Before he jump from wall, he stand like this—" and Wing Poh held his arms wide, balancing himself.

"I'll be double-damned!" O'Hara exploded. "That's just about the last straw! No handcuffs! What is this Meister—another Houdini?"

"But he didn't get the Kublai *cash!*" Driscoll put in. "Don't forget that, Sarge."

O'Hara gave a grim smile. "No, he didn't get the Kublai *cash*. Driscoll, better get back to the precinct and broadcast the bad news about the handcuffs. That leaves the boys with just about nothing to work on."

"You're staying here tonight, Sarge?" Driscoll asked.

O'Hara nodded. "You bet I am! I'm sticking right with the Kublai *cash* till Meister is behind bars!"

"Okay, Sarge," Driscoll said, and left for the precinct.

SOON afterward Detective Winters dropped in at No. 17 Paradise Court to see O'Hara. "We're doing everything possible to trace Meister," Winters reported, "but frankly, Sergeant, I'm not very hopeful. It's worse than hunting a needle in a haystack. In fact, I'm not

even sure we're looking in the right haystack."

"What do you mean?" O'Hara asked.

"Well, it seems mighty queer that Meister could slip in and out of Chinatown without being noticed. White men aren't that plentiful down here. I've never gone through a Chinatown street where there wasn't half a dozen Chinks lounging in doorways. So maybe Meister's still right here in your district, O'Hara. For all we know, he might have a hideout right here in Paradise Court."

"I don't think so," O'Hara replied. "I'd have heard about it before this. As you say, down here every white man is a marked man. Meister couldn't hide out anywhere in Chinatown and keep it a secret."

Winters frowned. "According to his record, Meister's a lone wolf, but I don't see how he hoped to pull off a job like this one without native help somewhere along the line."

"Well, Chinatown has its full quota of crooks and rascals," O'Hara replied very thoughtfully, "but how would Meister know whom to contact? This is strange territory to him. And even the crookedest Chink down here would think twice before making a move against the powerful Tsin Tien Tong."

"Maybe Meister dressed himself up as a Chinaman," Winters suggested. "He's an expert at disguise."

"That's out," O'Hara declared flatly. "I don't care how good he is in that line, he'd never fool the Chinks, not even on a dark night."

"Well, then, damn it, I give up!" Winters exclaimed irritably. "Every lead we get ends in a blind alley."

O'Hara smiled. "Just keep plugging, Winters. As the Chinese say: Who can tell the color of tomorrow's sky?"

After the Headquarters man had gone away, the front door of No. 17 Paradise Court was bolted for the night. Upstairs, Captain Moy Kee and Nang Yat made their customary final inspection of the treasure-rooms before locking up.

"Wah!" said Captain Moy, turning out the lights and closing the ponderous, iron-sheathed door. The broken locks had not been repaired, but Lee Shu had ordered a pair of strong iron hasps screwed into place, with padlocks to secure them.

Captain Moy snapped the padlocks and put the keys away in an inside pocket of his *shaam*.

Then he sealed up the door with strips of yellow paper on which he inscribed the seal of the Tsin Tien Tong and his own name.

Now that the doors were closed to the public, the tongsters abandoned their wooden-faced attitude. They moved about the house, chattering and laughing. Nang Yat served tea and rice cakes, and a fan-tan game started in the kitchen.

Lee Shu the banker paid them a brief visit to make sure that his orders were being carried out in exact detail, and later on Officer Burke came to get O'Hara's orders for the midnight shift of the Chinatown Squad.

THEN the house of Chung Chao settled down for the long night watch. Captain Moy himself slept in a chair tilted against the treasure-room door. One tongster settled down for the night with his back against the front door, while another was assigned to patrol the walled garden.

O'Hara yawned and stretched out wearily on a cot in the back parlor. The fan-tan game was still in progress in the kitchen. He lay relaxed and quiet in the darkness, listening lazily to the voices of the players. Then the voices faded away, and O'Hara slept.

He awoke with a jolt, to sit bolt upright, vaguely aware that some sort of sound had aroused him from sleep. The room was in darkness, but the hall light burned. O'Hara heard tense whispers and the swift pad-pad of the tongsters' slippered feet.

"Moy—what is it?" O'Hara called out as the tongster captain hurried past.

"Watchman in garden cry warning!" Moy Kee replied, and gave sharp orders to the tongsters on guard at the stairhead and the front door not to move from their posts. Then he hurried on toward the garden, with O'Hara at his heels.

CAPTAIN MOY flung swift questions at the excited guard, and the two of them jabbered away in a torrent of Cantonese. Then Moy Kee translated the gist of the conversation for O'Hara's benefit. The guard had been startled by a strange noise, a sort of swift fluttering overhead, such as a bird might make—but a large bird.

"Ask him if it could have been a pigeon?" O'Hara suggested.

No, the guard declared, not a pigeon; a pigeon made a flapping, creaking sound when it flew.

Moy Kee continued to ask questions. No, the guard answered, he had *seen* nothing. There had been only that strange sound in the night, sharp and clear.

O'Hara turned on his flashlight and swung the white beam around slowly on a complete circuit of the garden wall, then on up the side of the house to the close-barred windows of the treasure-rooms. But the guard poured out more Cantonese. The sound had not come from the garden wall, nor the trees, nor even from the house itself. It seemed to come directly from the sky, from straight overhead—

Then O'Hara switched off the flash, and they stood silent in the darkness, listening. The surrounding houses were merely black, brooding masses of shadow. There was no light anywhere save the dusty tinsel glitter of the stars—no sound save the faint tinkle-tinkle of a glass wind-chime in a neighboring garden.

"No doubt it was only a harmless night-noise—a mere nothing," Captain Moy said finally, "but *two* men shall stand guard here, instead of one."

Then the house of Chung Chao grew quiet again, but O'Hara lay on his cot, curiously tense and alert. He found himself straining his ears, as if waiting for the same swift, fluttering sound which had so startled the slant-eyed guard. The tongster stretched out at the front door mumbled and muttered in his sleep. O'Hara heard the iron bell in St. Mary's steeple strike two—then three—before he fell asleep again.

When he awoke, the early morning sun was streaming through the front windows. Nang Yat was striking a series of resonant notes from a kitchen chime to announce that breakfast was ready. Then the *mafoo* passed along the hall and went up the stairs to help Captain Moy open up the treasure-rooms for the day's exhibition.

O'Hara heard Moy Kee's voice, speaking between yawns — the rip-tip of the paper seals being torn from the door—the click and rattle of padlocks and iron hasps —the slow squeaking of the heavy door swinging inward.

In spite of himself, Sergeant O'Hara stood stockstill, listening with strangely taut nerves, even while he told himself, "Come on, snap out of it! You've got the jitters, that's all. Of course everything up there is okay. How could it be otherwise?"

Then came the first of the shrill cries from upstairs—Nang Yat's voice, and then Captain Moy's, raised in a loud wailing as their frantic footsteps came racing along the upper hall.

"Hai! Hai! Hola!" Captain Moy screamed from the stairhead, his face contorted with a mixture of panic, rage, fear, and utter bewilderment.

"What the hell—what's happened?" O'Hara shouted, but his instinct had already supplied the answer.

"Sah-jin!" Moy Kee shrilled. "The Kublai *cash*—they are gone!"

O'Hara took the stairs three at a time, with the Tsin Tien men racing pell-mell

at his heels. At the unsealed door of the treasure-room stood Nang Yat, pointing a trembling finger toward the cabinet which had held the priceless jade disks.

"*Cash* gone, Sah-jin!" the *mafoo* said in an awe-stricken whisper. "Door have strong locks—windows have iron bars—but nothing can stop the Rice Face Thief! *Ai-yee*—he is No. 1 devil!"

The glass-topped lid had been pried off the little cabinet, its looted interior empty now except for a small white card posed carefully upright—the card of "J. Bertram Chandler, M. A., Ph. D.!"

VII

THE three blue-coated men were alone in the strangely looted treasure-rooms—Sergeant O'Hara, Driscoll, and Burke. O'Hara had summarily ousted Captain Moy Kee and the clamorous Tsin Tien tongsters, and firmly closed the door behind them.

Driscoll, yardstick in hand, was calling off floor and wall measurements which O'Hara jotted down on a sheet of paper already liberally sprinkled with various calculations.

But when Driscoll had given the last measurements, O'Hara studied the sheet and shook his head. "Well, boys, that settles that.

There are no secret closets, sliding panels or anything on that order. There isn't a square inch of space in these two rooms not accounted for."

"Even if there were, Sarge," Driscoll pointed out, "how could Meister possibly know about it? If there was any trick stuff connected with these rooms, only Nang Yat the *mafoo* would know about it. There'd have to be a hook-up between Meister and Nang Yat."

"That wouldn't make sense," Burke chimed in. "If Nang Yat were crooked, why should he bother teaming up with anybody? He had the full run of the house, day and night—he knew where Chung Chao's keys were hidden—he could have stolen the *cash* by a solo job any time he wanted."

O'Hara went over to one of the windows and tested the iron bars.

"Go ahead, Sarge, yank all you like," Burke invited. "I've checked over every one of those bars, and they're absolutely okay. However Meister got in here—and out again—you can bet your bottom dollar it wasn't the windows."

O'Hara looked thoughtful. "Well, the door's an even tougher proposition. Captain Moy slept there all night, with his chair actually tilted against the door, and the padlock keys in his pocket. And the door was sealed up, too."

Driscoll made a baffled gesture. "Well, Sarge, that leaves only one possible angle—the Kublai *cash* must have been stolen *before* the treasure-rooms were locked up for the night!"

"No," O'Hara replied slowly, "I'm convinced the *cash* were still safe in the cabinet when the doors were sealed. Captain Moy swears they were, and Nang Yat backs him up. They made the last inspection tour together—and they went in together this morning."

"They could both be lying," Driscoll countered.

"Yes, that's a possibility," O'Hara agreed. "But if you take that line—then how did Meister leave his calling card in the cabinet?"

"The whole damn set-up is screwy," Driscoll said disgustedly. "According to the evidence, nobody could possibly break into the strong-room — but the *cash* are gone, just the same, and gone without a single, solitary clue."

"We've got *one* curious piece of evidence," O'Hara replied slowly, "if we could make it mean anything."

"What?" Burke asked.

"That mysterious, fluttering sound the outside guard heard last night around midnight, when he gave the alarm. It sounded something like a bird, he said, but quicker

than a bird. A sort of *whitt!*—short and sharp."

Driscoll's head lifted. "Say, Sarge—did you ever watch Moy Kee do his knife tricks? When he throws a knife, it makes a sharp noise something like that."

"A thrown knife?" O'Hara frowned, turning the idea over in his mind while his eyes wandered slowly over Chung Chao's collection of antique weapons. Here were knives of all descriptions.

"No," O'Hara decided, shaking his head. "The space between the window bars is too small for a thrown knife to get through. But wait, Driscoll — wait! I think you've put me on the right track!"

O'Hara turned suddenly toward the display of weapons along the wall, pointing to a curiously shaped Manchu bow and a leather quiver filled with ancient hunting arrows.

"An arrow!" he exclaimed in mounting excitement. "That's what the guard heard whizzing through the air! Burke, look in the catalogue and see how many arrows are listed for this Manchu bow—Item 281."

Burke hastily thumbed over the pages. "Eleven arrows, Sarge."

"That's it!" O'Hara exulted. "There are only *ten* in this quiver! There's an arrow missing, and I know what happened to it! It was shot through one of these windows last night! There's our first break, boys! Now we've got something to work on!"

"But why an arrow?" Burke questioned. "What good would it do the thief to shoot an arrow at the guard? Sounds crazy to me!"

"Who said it was aimed at the guard?" O'Hara demanded. "The arrow wasn't aimed at anybody! But it wasn't just a random shot. It was for a purpose, all right—a very special purpose."

Driscoll gave him a puzzled look. "It's Greek to me, Sarge, but you sound like you knew all about it."

"I think I do!" O'Hara said grimly. "I think I know a lot of things, all of a sudden. But first we've got to find out more about that arrow."

And going to the rear windows, O'Hara looked out, measuring with his eye the distance to the back of the neighboring houses. "No—too far to shoot accurately," he muttered. "And those trees in the gardens—the guard would have heard the arrow slashing through the leaves if it had gone in that direction."

He moved to the side window, staring across at the side of the adjoining house—No. 15 Paradise Court—and particularly at the matching window which stood exactly opposite him.

"That'd be the one," O'Hara declared. "You wouldn't have to be an expert to shoot an arrow through that window from here, even in the dark."

"Yes, but breaking glass makes quite a racket," Driscoll remarked. "That window's closed tight enough now. How do you know it was open last night?"

"Let's just assume it was," O'Hara said, and then grinned at his assistant. "I guess you think I've gone nuts, eh? Just give me a little more time, Driscoll. I think we're ready to crack this case wide open!"

Driscoll jerked his thumb toward the opposite window. "Do you know who lives in that room, Sarge?"

O'Hara shook his head. "No, but it won't take us more than a couple of minutes to check up. It's a lodging house run by a fat Chink named Tai Kuh. Come along, Driscoll. And Burke—you go downstairs and make sure that no one

leaves this house until we get back—nobody! And keep mum about that arrow, even to Moy Kee!"

So Sergeant O'Hara and Driscoll slipped quietly out of Chung Chao's house and rapped on the door of No. 15 Paradise Court, whose sign in "broken stick" writing proclaimed it as the "Palace of Dreamless Sleep."

Tai Kuh himself opened the door, but the paunchy, moon-faced proprietor of No. 15 showed neither hesitation nor nervousness in answering Sergeant O'Hara's questions about his second floor room which faced Chung's treasure-chamber.

"Nobody sleep in that room three-four week, Sah-jin," Tai Kuh declared. "All time I keep that door lock. You like make look-see?"

Whereupon Tai Kuh escorted them upstairs, unlocked the door, and invited them to enter. The room was furnished very simply—a sleeping *k'ang,* a chair, a chest of drawers, and a strip of rice matting. A fine layer of dust covered everything—the furniture, the floor, the window sill.

"Well, Tai Kuh wasn't lying," Driscoll remarked. "Nobody's been inside this room for a long time."

O'HARA was silent, frowning at the film of dust on the floor. He examined the window frame carefully, then turned the catch and tried to raise the sash. The window opened slowly and jerkily, with a great deal of rattling vibration.

"A noise like that would sound even louder at midnight," Driscoll pointed out. "The guard would certainly have heard it. It looks like your arrow theory's blown up, Sarge."

"Hold on!" O'Hara exclaimed, a sudden gleam in his eye. "The roof! It could just as well have been the roof! Come on!"

They climbed out through a back window and hoisted themselves up to the top level of the roof. "Holy Cats!" Driscoll gasped as he swung his legs over the edge. "There *is* an arrow! I see it—over there by the far cornice!"

Driscoll reached the antique arrow half a jump ahead of O'Hara. "Look, Sarge—it's got something tied to it!"

O'Hara snatched at the lumpy folds of cloth tied around the shaft just behind the rusty iron barb. He pulled it loose, ripping at the knotted folds, and suddenly three little disks of blood-red jade spilled out into his palm — the three priceless *cash* of Kublai Khan!

VIII

DRISCOLL stared at O'Hara in utter amazement. "But it's fantastic, Sarge! Why the devil would Meister tie these *cash* to an arrow and shoot them up here onto Tai Kuh's roof? That's crazy! Why didn't he simply carry 'em off in his pocket?"

O'Hara grinned at him. "Meister left his calling card in the rifled cabinet, didn't he? Well, Driscoll, just turn that fact over in your mind, then think over this business with the arrow, and you've got the answer to your question."

"The two things don't hook up at all!" Driscoll protested.

O'Hara's smile widened. "Maybe that's your answer, Driscoll! Come on, let's get back to Chung Chao's. The faster we move now, the better!"

Two minutes later they were back at No. 17. O'Hara had pocketed the Kublai *cash* and he slid the Manchu arrow under his coat before they stepped briskly past the Tsin Tien guard at the front door.

Burke and Moy Kee were talking together in the hall, and O'Hara beckoned to the tongster captain. "Moy Kee, do your men understand their orders? No one must leave this house until I give the word!"

"Yes, Sah-jin."

"Good!" O'Hara turned to Burke. "Bring Wing Poh out here. I want to ask him a question or two."

In a moment Burke returned from the kitchen with Nang Yat's assistant, who glanced with slantwise curiosity at the intent faces awaiting him.

"Wing Poh," O'Hara asked quietly, "you stayed here all night, didn't you?"

"Yes, Sah-jin."

"Where did you sleep?"

"In little room top-side floor, Sah-jin. Nang Yat show me."

O'Hara looked at him. "Didn't you wake up around midnight, with all that commotion in the garden? I didn't see you there with all the others."

Wing Poh smiled. "Not wake up, Sah-jin. Me very tired last night—sleep strong—hear nothing."

Then O'Hara's casual manner was flung aside like a discarded mask, as his voice crackled and snapped. "Quit lying, Wing Poh! *You spent the night in Chung Chao's treasure-room!*"

Wing Poh jerked as though a whip had flicked him. "Not so! Not so!" he jabbered excitedly. "Sah-jin make joke, yiss? I sleep all night top-side room, I swear by Tao! Sah-jin speak like *gila*-man!"

"Oh! I'm crazy, am I?" O'Hara said. He pulled the antique Manchu arrow from under his coat. "Ever see *that* before, Wing?"

The yellow man took a quick step backward. For a split second naked panic peered out of his slant eyes, then his face resumed its wooden stolidity. "Never see, Sah-jin!" he said stubbornly.

"You'd better talk, Wing — and talk fast!" O'Hara warned. "Or shall I tell Captain Moy where I found that arrow, and show him what was tied to it?"

A flicker of fear passed through the yellow man's eyes. He breathed noisily, his thin nostrils flaring, a nervous tongue wetting dry lips. But he held to his stubborn silence, even while he saw O'Hara's hand groping in a pocket.

"How about these?" O'Hara said, holding out the three red jade *cash*. "*Now* you know the game's up, Wing!"

Captain Moy exploded in shrill curses at sight of the Kublai *cash*. He hurled himself forward, plucking a knife from his sleeve, and Wing Poh screeched with terror at the flash of naked steel.

But O'Hara sprang between them, holding back the furious tongster. "Take it easy, Moy Kee," he counseled. "Wing Poh gets one more chance to come clean."

WING POH crouched against the wall, his face livid with sweating fear. His head darted this way and that, vainly seeking an avenue of escape.

O'Hara's hand shot out, gripping the front of Wing Poh's *shaam,* jerking him forward. "I've got just one question, Wing, but you'd better answer it! *Where is Meister?* Where did you hide him?"

"Not know, Sah-jin!" Wing Poh stammered. "Not know! Rice Face Thief run away—he jump over wall like I tell you! I swear it by Tao—by Milo Fo!"

"You're still lying!" O'Hara snapped. "Meister never left this house! Your whole story about his escape was a pack of lies! Alive or dead, Meister is hidden here somewhere. We'll find him, if we have to tear the whole place apart, board by board and brick by brick, so you might as well talk!"

"Give Wing Poh into our hands, Sah-jin!" Captain Moy pleaded fiercely. "Give him to us for ten minutes only—we find a way to make him talk!"

The last remnants of Wing Poh's courage wilted before the grim words of the tongster captain. "The Tsin Tien men will kill me!" he whimpered to O'Hara. "Send them away, Sah-jin, and I will speak—I will tell everything! I will tell where—"

"Watch out, Sarge! The stairs!" Burke yelled, and O'Hara's head swiveled toward the staircase. Nang Yat the *mafoo* stood on the upper landing, a black-barreled revolver in his hand, his slant-eyed face contorted with a venomous rage.

"Wing Poh not speak!" the *mafoo* snarled. He squeezed the trigger, and the

halls echoed with the rattling explosion. With a choking cry Wing Poh stumbled and collapsed. But Nang Yat's gun went on spitting bullets at the writhing, groaning figure below.

Driscoll and O'Hara had leaped aside as the fusillade started; Captain Moy crouched low against the banister. As O'Hara's gun came out, Burke's .38 barked twice from the back hallway.

"Good shot, Burke!" O'Hara called out. Nang Yat gave a yelping cry, clutching at the banister rail to save himself from falling. The gun slipped from his fingers and came bouncing down the stairs as the *mafood* took three or four lurching steps along the hall before he fell.

O'Hara led the swarming rush up the stairs. He seized the fallen *mafoo* by the shoulder, repeating the question he had asked Wing Poh. "Where's Meister? Where have you hidden him?"

Nang Yat made no reply. For a moment his eyes still glared savage hatred and defiance, then his gaze became vague and clouded—his chin sagged against his breast.

"He's faking, Sarge!" Burke said. "Look—all he's got is a wound in the leg. My slug only nicked him."

"No, it's more than that," O'Hara declared. He lifted the *mafoo's* hand and forced open the clenched fingers from a small crystal phial—empty now of everything save a peculiarly bitter smell.

"Get going, Burke!" O'Hara ordered crisply, rising. "Get Doc Stanage here—in a hurry!"

When the police surgeon arrived, he examined Nang Yat and shook his head. "No use wasting time on this one, Sergeant."

O'Hara held out the crystal phial he had pried from the *mafoo's* hand. "Take a sniff, Doc. I think this is the same stuff killed old Chung Chao."

Dr. Stanage sniffed. "Yes, that's it, Sergeant. Well, I'll get busy on that China boy downstairs. I think he'll pull through—none of the bullets lodged in a vital spot."

"Do your best, Doc," O'Hara said. "We'll never get the whole story unless Wing Poh talks. Driscoll, you stick with Wing Poh while the Doc does his stuff—keep pumping him for details. Burke, you come along with me. We've got to find Erik Meister."

Burke's eyes opened wide. "Then you really meant all that stuff about Meister still being hidden here in the house?"

"Of course I meant it," O'Hara said. "As soon as I found the arrow I knew Wing Poh's story about Meister's escape was a phoney from start to finish."

O'Hara led the way into Nang Yat's room. "Now here's the way I figure it, Burke. Meister is lying on this *k'ang*, unconscious and handcuffed. I am downstairs, getting first aid treatment from Nang Yat. Wing Poh comes creeping up the back stairs and sneaks into the room. He puts Meister away in some sort of secret hiding-place, then locks the door. He takes a chair, smashes through the window, jumps from the back roof into the garden, and sneaks back to his post in the kitchen while we're still upstairs hammering at Nang Yat's door."

"But why did they want to hide Meister?" Burke asked.

"I think that I can make a pretty good guess," O'Hara replied. "But we'd better find him first, and talk about it afterward."

O'Hara looked around the room. "No place in here to hide a man's body except the closet, and we've given that a going over. Wing wouldn't dare take a chance on dragging Meister along the hall. That leaves him with only one other exit—through this door which leads into Chung Chao's room."

O'Hara unbolted the door and they went through into Chung's old chamber. Burke probed into the contents of a large camphorwood chest, while the sergeant sounded the walls of two closets.

"Nothing here!" Burke reported. "Any luck, Sarge?"

"Nothing!" O'Hara echoed, then his wandering glance came to rest on the silk-draped *k'ang*. "No use overlooking the obvious, Burke. Plenty of room under that to hide a man's body!"

O'Hara stripped back the silken covers and began to tug at the mattress, when Burke cried out excitedly, "You've hit it, Sarge! You've hit it! It's Meister!"

TOGETHER they overturned the bamboo framework of the *k'ang* to reach the body of Erik Meister, still handcuffed, gagged, and bound mummy-like with rope and long strips of cloth. O'Hara removed the cloth gag, but Meister did not move nor open his eyes.

"More work for Doc Stanage," the sergeant said. "He's still alive and breathing—but just about. Nang Yat and Wing Poh simply tied him up and stuck him away in there to die. Those two scheming Chinks sure gave the poor devil a rough time of it."

"What do you mean—poor devil?" Burke countered. "Why waste sympathy on Meister? Maybe he was doublecrossed out of the Kublai *cash*, but he's still got that murder rap waiting for him on account of old Chung's death."

O'Hara shook his head. "No! Meister had no more to do with Chung Chao's death than you had! The way I see it, Nang Yat schemed this whole job, with Wing Poh to help out as assistant. Meister wasn't in on it at all—he came along just in time to be the fall guy. Now get Doc Stanage up here."

The police surgeon came up the stairs, grumbling. "Another one, Sergeant? I'd save time by opening an office here."

O'Hara laughed. "How's Wing Poh?"

"He's doing all right," Dr. Stanage replied. "Two bullets in his thigh and one in the shoulder. Nothing too serious, except that he's lost a lot of blood." The police surgeon gave a dry chuckle. "But Driscoll tells him he'll die at any moment, and the Chink is talking away a mile a minute. You'll get your story, Sergeant."

And the terrified Wing Poh was still pouring out his confession to Driscoll when O'Hara came down and joined in the questioning. Shortly afterward, Lee Shu the banker arrived in haste, shaken for once out of his Oriental calm by the daring attempt against the Kublai *cash*. Then Alexander Bishop's car pulled up outside.

"Headquarters phoned me that you'd captured Erik Meister!" the collector said excitedly. "Is it true, Sergeant? Has he confessed?"

"We've got him, all right," O'Hara replied, "but Meister won't be able to do any talking for some time. He's in pretty bad shape. However, we can reconstruct most of this affair without any help from him. As a matter of fact, Meister actually knows less about what happened than anybody else in this house. As it turns out, the whole thing was Nang Yat's scheme, from beginning to end."

"Nang Yat, the *mafoo?*" Bishop asked, astonished, while Lee Shu contented himself with a deep-drawn, hissing breath.

"I'll sketch it briefly," O'Hara said. "Several months ago Chung Chao called in a scrivener and had a new will drawn up. Somehow Nang Yat learned that he would receive nothing when Chung died—every dollar was to go to the China War Fund. Nang Yat was pretty sore about being cut out like that after all his years of service, so he decided to help himself to something valuable ahead of time."

O'Hara turned to the collector. "Probably the *mafoo* was listening when you made Chung Chao those offers for the Kublai *cash*. At any rate, he decided the jade *cash* would be his particular loot. And your warning about Meister fell right in with his plans—every one would think that the clever white thief had stolen the *cash*.

"So Nang Yat drugged his master's tea

one night, and as soon as old Chung and Meng Tai and Sang Lum the guard were unconscious, he took Chung's keys and opened the treasure-room. But to his amazement the Kublai *cash* were not in their silver casket—"

"Nang Yat not know I take them away," Lee Shu put in. "Nobody know that, but Chung Chao and myself."

O'Hara nodded. "So there was the *mafoo,* stuck right in the fly-paper. No *cash,* three men drugged, and hell to pay when they woke up! He had to do some mighty quick thinking, and he did! He remembered about Meister, and set about faking the scene. He re-locked the treasure-room and put the keys back in their hiding-place. Then he battered the locks till the door was broken. He went downstairs and left the front door banging in the wind to attract attention. Quam Lee happened to come along, took a quick look, and went running for the police, while Nang Yat stretched out in the kitchen, tied himself up, and then handed us that phoney yarn about how Meister waylaid him in the hall."

"A tricky devil!" Bishop remarked.

"Wait—that was only the preliminary round," O'Hara went on. "Nang Yat had no intention of giving up on the *cash.* True, they were now back in the treasure-room, but the Tsin Tien guard was on the job, and he had to figure out a way to get around them. He worked out a scheme, but he needed help to put it through, so he brought in Wing Poh as his assistant.

"So Nang Yat was all set to pull off the job, when Meister barged into the picture—Meister, who had no idea he was wanted for old Chung's death! And then I captured Meister—and *there* was a spot for the *mafoo* to get out of! He simply had to get Meister out of my clutches before I'd have a chance to question him, or their whole scheme would fall apart.

"Well, they did it! While I was downstairs with Nang Yat, Wing Poh slipped into the *mafoo's* room and dragged Meister under the *k'ang* in Chung's room. Then he pulled off that phoney escape through the window. With Meister safely hidden, they went right ahead with their scheme for stealing the Kublai *cash.*"

"But how—how?" Bishop exclaimed. "Unless there was a secret entrance to the rooms, the conditions seem impossible."

O'HARA grinned. "On the contrary, Nang Yat's scheme was really quite simple. When Captain Moy was ready to lock up for the night, Nang Yat went inside with him to make sure everything was okay. The *mafoo* made a great show of testing the window bars, and then talking a little while about the *cash.* Meanwhile, Wing Poh had been waiting across the hall, in Nang Yat's room. He slipped quietly into the treasure-room and hid behind the door while Nang Yat was talking. As Captain Moy and Nang Yat came out, the *mafoo* made sure that *he* was the one to swing the door shut. Moy put on the padlocks and the seals, having no idea that Wing Poh was locked inside the room."

"*Hai!* I catch!" Lee Shu exclaimed. "Wing Poh stayed in locked room all night!"

"That's it!" O'Hara said. "Wing Poh had all night to work in. He quietly broke open the cabinet, tied the three *cash* to the shaft of the arrow, and shot it across onto the next roof. They'd found the Chandler calling cards on Meister when they searched him, and put one in the looted cabinet. A good touch, that—just the kind of theatrical gesture Meister himself might make."

"And Wing Poh got out of the room the same way he came in?" Bishop asked.

"Exactly! Wing Poh was hiding behind the door again when it was opened in the morning. Of course Nang Yat promptly 'discovered' the rifled cabinet and let out a yell that brought Captain Moy rushing to him to see what was up—which gave Wing Poh his chance to hop out and

slide into the *mafoo's* room. It's as tricky a scheme as I ever ran into, and if the outside guard hadn't heard the whirring noise that arrow made they might have gotten away with it."

"But they didn't!" Bishop said. "And I congratulate you, Sergeant. That's as fine a piece of sleuthing as I ever heard of."

O'Hara shrugged. "It could have been better, Mr. Bishop. It took me a long time to realize that Meister might be only a straw-man in this case. Even then I slipped up on a couple points. When I found the arrow, I thought Wing Poh had used that trick to double-cross Nang Yat and keep the *cash* for himself. But I was wrong. The arrow was Nang Yat's bright idea—"

"But why?" Bishop asked. "Why didn't Wing Poh simply keep the stolen *cash* in his pocket?"

"Because Nang Yat was afraid something might go wrong and Wing Poh be caught in the act. In which case, if we couldn't find the jade *cash* on him, we'd have a hell of a time proving theft. That *mafoo* didn't miss a trick!"

"And what was the other point you missed?" Bishop inquired.

"Well, naturally I thought at first that Meister had planned the job, and that the two Chinks simply gave him the old double-cross at the right moment. But as it turns out, Meister was never in on the deal."

O'Hara's smile widened into a grin. "Headquarters warned me that Meister was as slick as they come. Well, he isn't the first white crook to try his luck down here. Chinatown always looks like a push-over—till you start pushing! And I don't think Mr. Erik Meister will be back for another try, either. Next time he'll plan something a little easier—something like cracking the gold vaults at Fort Knox!

"IS GOD DEAD?"

(as this war grows worse Americans are asking that question)

Well, I can say to them that God is most certainly NOT dead for I TALKED WITH GOD, and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do—well—there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering—and now—?—well, I own control of the largest daily newspaper in our County, I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine. I own my own home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God. and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest, unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well—this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be—all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about—it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well—just write a letter or a postcard to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 111, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now—while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable—but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was.—Advt. Copyright, 1942, Frank B. Robinson.

All in the Night's Work

Last Ship Out of Madagascar. . . .

By GORDON KEYNE

Author of "Bombardier Out of Java," etc.

JUST before three on the afternoon of September 9th, Ralph Cartier left his car in the street and walked into the Banque de Madagascar. He was well known here. Just before the war broke he had come from New York as assistant manager and expert in American methods of the big paper mills outside Mojanga, and had stayed on by virtue of necessity.

When the teller lifted his eyebrows at the size of the check Cartier pushed in at the window, the American smiled. He had to work fast or lose everything.

"We're meeting a shift in the payroll tomorrow, Delorme. Put it in a bag, will you?"

The teller complied. He was too confused to reflect that Cartier's personal account, thus emptied, would scarcely be

used to meet a company payroll. With the packets of thousand-franc notes in a cloth sack under his arm, Cartier walked out to his car, tossed in the sack carelessly, locked the car, then sauntered away from it, down the street toward the Grand Hotel. He had pulled it off.

Here in Mojanga, as elsewhere in Madagascar, things had been in a sorry state ever since the British jumped into Diego Suarez at the end of April. Since then, the British had been temporizing and appeasing. Vichy France held all the rest of Madagascar, and plenty of Japanese agents and arms were on hand to get native regiments armed and equipped. Any French who sympathized with the Fighting French and the Allies were relentlessly smoked out. Some fled to the British, but that was now impossible, and a new purge was going on.

Cartier looked his usual trim, brisk self, a smile on his sunburnt features, but his dark eyes were swift and wary. Mojanga, too, looked her usual sun-drenched self. The red roofs, the masses of flowers everywhere, the cobbled streets and porticoed houses of the many Hindu merchants, the wide expanse of river estuary, the immense activity of the docks and harbor, all were superficially as usual.

The streets were thronged with French officers and police, with proud Hovas from the far red hills, with savage Sakalavas from rice fields and fisheries, with Hindus, Chinese, Arab traders—and, now and then, a brown, sharp-eyed son of the Rising Sun.

But something indefinable hung above the throngs. Cartier sensed it now, as he had sensed it in the early days of the year before the first purge, before the British raid that had promised so much and accomplished so little. He could glimpse it in the flashing eyes and taut faces. It was terror, the sharp suspense of terror that now hung anew over the great red hills of Madagascar; the helpless terror of those who are aware of approaching doom.

Something was happening and about to happen, and Cartier knew what it was. Another purge of Axis sympathizers and Fighting French. He himself was in danger now, as an American, and had received subtle warnings. And he was not waiting to be kicked in the pants by Japanese agents.

Cartier turned in at the café of the Grand Hotel, then paused. A young officer in horizon blue rose from one of the little tables and departed. He walked past Cartier without a sign of recognition. For one instant, however, their eyes met, and in this instant Cartier nodded slightly. Then he went on to the little table just vacated by the officer, and sat down.

"Nosi," he said to the waiter. From Morocco to Djibouti this was slang for the good coffee of Nosi Be, grown on the northwest coast of Madagascar.

The waiter gone, Cartier looked down eagerly at the table. On the marble top was some tiny penciled writing left by the young officer. His gaze devoured the words:

"Lamotte dead, the others arrested. It is at hand; all is lost save hope. If you get the money, see Lal Das. At the villa in an hour. Renouf has arrived; no one else."

Cartier spilled a little water and casually rubbed his finger over the words, vacantly looking down the street as he did so.

The little cup of coffee arrived. With it came loud voices from inside the café, the deceptively furious voices of Gallic altercation. Cartier glanced up at the waiter.

"What's going on in there?"

"The police, M'sieu. They are taking away the wireless."

Two gendarmes came out, one carrying a radio set. Boos followed them from men at the tables, insults pursued them. One turned and shook his hand threateningly, with an expletive.

"Ta guele, Vichy!" cried somebody. *"Ta bouche, toi!* Shut your mouth!"

Cartier slopped water into his coffee to cool it, gulped it down, dropped a coin on the table, and departed, going in leisurely fashion but wasting no time. Orders might already be out for his arrest; no one was safe if the purge was here. He headed back for his car.

ON THE way, he paused and dropped in a little *tabac*. The shop was empty except for the woman behind the counter. He bought cigarettes from her.

"Any news, Mere Louise?" he asked under his breath.

"Riots at Tananarive, the capital, M'sieu. Shootings at Maintorano. The new native troops are coming down the river and will be here tomorrow. God help us all!" Her stolid face was tragic. "What misery, that the English did not seize all the island when they took Diego!"

Cartier went his way, unlocked his car, got in and drove off. Well, he had the money anyhow, which was the main thing. Now to see Lal Das about escape; not for himself alone, either. It was make or break, with life staked on the cards.

He headed for the Rue des Bijoutiers Hindous, and halted before the unassuming shop of one of those same Hindu jewelers—who were, in reality, merchants in everything from cut brass to Agra carpets. Debonair, humming a little tune, he entered the shop and nodded to the attendant.

"Lal Das?"

The young Hindu pointed. Cartier went on to the rear, pulled aside a curtain, and shook his hands with a wrinkled old Hindu clad in white. He sat down, at a gesture, and spoke.

"No time to waste, Lal Das. Your ship's leaving at sunset or before, I understand. Four of us at least."

Lal Das nodded, donned spectacles, and peered at the visitor.

"Who?" he demanded. "I must know."

"Taking no chances on spies, eh?" Cartier smiled. "Right. Lieutenant Gros and his sister—Gros of the Artillery. And Captain Renouf, just from the capital. We may be pinched any minute, so we'd better leave town in a hurry."

"I think you had," agreed Lal Das. "Yes; the ship leaves at five. She goes out to sea; after dark, doubles back in through the Outer Reef, and can pick you up about midnight at the Andranolava inlet. She will send a boat ashore; flash a light three times. You can get there by a rough road, with a car."

"Right," said Cartier, and allowed himself one deep sigh of relief. "If we can get General Gros to go with us, we will; I'm afraid he's too pig-headed. How much?"

"Twenty thousand francs. Now," said Lal Das.

"Very well. Send your clerk out to the car with me. He'd better carry something. Make it one of those embroidered white wool rugs."

"That will be eighty francs more," said Lal Das, who was a careful man.

Cartier paid him the eighty francs, from his pocket.

He went back to his car and dipped into the thousand-franc notes, getting the amount necessary. After a moment or two the clerk came out, carrying the Benares rug which was tied in a roll. He put it into the car and took the banknotes, pausing to count them.

"Thank you, M'sieu," he said. "The master wanted me to warn you not to keep Captain Trenchard waiting tonight."

Cartier nodded and drove away. Trenchard! Englishman, no doubt; some broken-down old Britisher commanding this Hindu lugger, which was not even a steamer, and not much better than an Arab dhow. For a thousand years the Hindus of Bombay and the Arabs of Muscat had maintained a huge and steady commerce with Madagascar. Cartier was just as glad that in this moment of crisis he and the others would not be dependent upon some muddle-headed Arab *rais* or Hindu skipper. Even a bleary old whiskey-swiller

would be an improvement, he thought. In his mind lurked a hideous certainty that the getaway would not be so simple.

AS HE started for the Fort Hill road, the words of Mere Louise recurred to him: "The new native troops will be here tomorrow." New native troops! Too well Cartier knew what this meant. Those new levies, raised by Governor General Annet and the Vichy administration, were in effect a fifth column arm. God help any white troops who came out for Free France! God help officers or men who led protests against the heavy Japanese infiltration and the Japanese mission now at work, or against the Laval policies!

At the crest of the mangrove-covered hill, Cartier drove past the ancient Arab fort which gave the height its name of Rova, and his gaze went to the glorious view below, picking up the smoke-smudge of the paper mills far up the river.

"Good old Papeteries de Madagascar!" he muttered. "Well, tomorrow your assistant manager will be either in jail or dead or safely on his way to Zanzibar and British territory. It'll depend largely on red-nosed Captain Trenchard to say which."

Glimpses of the view from this locally-termed "Corniche" drive reached him. Outspread below was the city, beyond it the wide delta of the Betsiboka River and the great harbor. Out to far vistas of the hills stretched rice-fields and forests—those red, red hills that closed the horizon! Red were the mountains, hills and very earth itself of Madagascar; now a rusty hue, again a bright and fiery deepness of color, but always red. Only the coral sands fringing these volcanic rocks were white.

And, westward, he glimpsed the Mozambique Channel, swept by gusty rain and squalls, usually electric-charged and swept by almost incessant lightning. For the monsoon had changed, everything was disturbed and disrupted, and those waters, the most dreaded and treacherous in the whole world, were fanged with coral and alive with constantly changing currents. A trifle over two hundred miles away lay Mozambique and Africa—safety and refuge barred to hapless victims of the Vichy administration, for the great island had become a prison none could leave.

Cartier was in the new city now, among the villas and handsome residences high on the hill where the air was always fresh and clear. Apparently he was not followed, but he could be sure of nothing. His sentiments were too well known; he was dangerous; for a week past he had been shadowed, and arrest might come at any instant. The fact that he was an American citizen would not protect him, for the men of Vichy held Americans in deadly hatred.

He swung his car in beside a white villa almost solid on one side with scarlet bougainvillea. Locking the car with the money inside, he sprang up the steps to the door. It was opened before he could knock, by the young officer who had been at the café.

"What luck, Raoul?"

"All set," Cartier responded cheerfully, and Gros closed the door with a sharp sigh of suspense ended.

Three others were here. Cartier shook hands with the old general, a veteran with white hair and goatee, with Jacqueline Gros, a tall young woman whose anxious eyes warmed in greeting, and with Captain Renouf, a thin, haggard man in the midnight blue of the aviation.

Exclamations burst upon the room, everyone talking at once. Cartier laughed and held up his hands for silence. When he met the gaze of Jacqueline, one eloquent look passed between them, a look of mutual understanding.

"My friends, there's no time to lose in idle chatter," he said gravely. "I got my money from the bank. I saw Lal Das and made the arrangements. His ship picks us up at midnight on the coast north of town, at the Andranolava inlet. We'll go in my car and abandon it; and the quicker we get

out of town, the better. Renouf, what luck?"

"Bad," said Captain Renouf, indicating a briefcase on a chair. "I have the reports of the Nipponese mission and agents in that *portefeuille*, also the other papers supplied by our friends in the administration; everything the British need. But I had a hard job leaving the capital—had to steal a car. They'll be hot after me. Lamotte was killed getting the car."

"And worse news on the way," added Raimond Gros despairingly. "Arrests are being made on all sides—"

"Never mind." Cartier turned to the old general. "Are you coming with us, sir?"

"I am not," refused General Gros. "As a retired officer, I have nothing to fear. Let Raimond go, and Jacqueline—"

"If you stay, I stay," broke in the young woman almost savagely.

"No. Believe me," said Cartier, taking her hand and looking her in the eyes, "your father is right; he will not be harmed. With you, it is different. I can't go if you stay. We need you, all of us. You've been active in the Free France cause. Now, we can't afford a delay of even five minutes; it's urgent that we leave at once, get out of town, and reach comparative safety before dark. Don't talk. Pack what you must take."

"Right," said Renouf. He had a harsh, tired voice. "You must come, Jacqueline. They are going to establish concentration camps at once."

"She will go," said the general. "My dear, run and pack; it's my wish and command. Insist, and you jeopardize us all."

A hot breath, a burst of emotion, and she was gone. Her brother went with her. Renouf looked at Cartier, as the old general brought the latter a glass.

"Luck!" said Cartier, clinking glasses with the other two. "What is it, Renouf?"

"This." Renouf touched the briefcase. "It must get through, whatever happens; it is for the British. I was to meet one of their intelligence men here in Mojanga. I dared not stop in the city to look for him. His name is Trenchard."

"Eh?" Cartier was startled. "Trenchard? But that's the name of the ship's captain who will pick us up! Lal Das told me so!"

"Ha! Good work!" Renouf looked suddenly rejuvenated; his eyes sparkled. "It must be the same man—now we have only to reach him! Eh? What is it?"

General Gros had gone to the front window. He swung around, speaking quickly.

"Into the next room, both of you! A car, two men; they may be agents—"

Cartier ducked into the dining-room, adjacent. Renouf caught up the briefcase and followed. On the dining table stood a brandy bottle and a blue siphon of seltzer. Cartier finished his drink and put down his glass. There was a moment of silence, then came the voice of the general as he opened the front door before the visitors could knock.

"Well, messieurs! Your business?"

"You are M. le General Gros?"

"I am.

"We've an order for your arrest and for that of your son, Lieutenant Gros. Stand aside, old cockerel! Take it quietly, come in the car, no fuss. Where's the boy? No use lying; we know he's here—"

Cartier scarcely heard the outraged protestations of the old man. He met the tragic look of Renouf, as the two agents came into the house. With a sudden movement, he shoved the brandy bottle at the aviation captain, and caught up the half-empty siphon.

"Now or never!" he said under his breath. "Ready?"

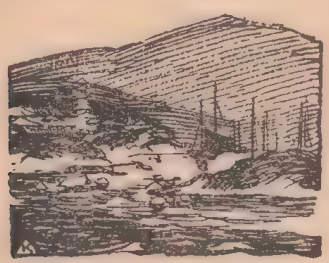
Renouf seized the bottle. It all happened in the flicker of an instant. The two agents, sweeping the general with them, came into the next room. Cartier darted forward and threw up the siphon, standing in the opening between the rooms.

The jetting seltzer struck all three men. Oaths, sharp cries—then Renouf was past

him and at them like a tiger, swinging the bottle. The impact was sickening to hear; a pistol blared sound through the house—a wild shot. Cartier swung the siphon smack into the face of the agent with the pistol, swung it again and the bluish glass burst.

Upon the scene broke Raimond Gros and his sister. The two agents were sprawled and senseless, old General Gros was frantically dabbing charged water from his eyes, Renouf was picking up the pistol. Cartier jumped to the window.

"All right!" he cried. "No one else in the car. Tumble out into my car, everyone! Get your stuff, Jacqueline! General, you go with us now—no argument! Anything to eat in the house, fetch it along—your job, Jack! Look sharp, everybody! Raimond, get your father into the car—hurt, Renouf?"



Renouf shook his head. A handbag, another, coat and hat for the old man—they were all in frantic motion. Cartier got out to his own car on the jump, unlocked it, went to the police car, took out the ignition key and tossed it into the shrubbery.

The general, muttering oaths and fury, came out with Renouf. Raimond Gros brought the bags. Cartier climbed in and got the engine started; fortunately, the shot had drawn no attention, the houses around being embowered in gardens. Jacqueline appeared, lugging a huge basket of food and wine-bottles. Cartier alighted and took it from her.

"Cloak and hat, Jack! And hurry."

She went back and presently came out, hurriedly fastening a cloak about her. She was in beside Cartier, and the latter threw in the clutch. The car started away, leaped into speed, and was gone.

"Not the way we wanted to go," said he cheerfully, "but on our way just the same! A near squeeze. Renouf, you certainly slapped that boy's ears down!"

"What did you say?" asked the captain. Cartier laughed, realizing that he had spoken in English; he translated, and nervous laughter swept them all close to hysteria.

"North road, now," went on Cartier. They shot out past the barracks and the European cemetery, and swung around past the enclosure containing the tombs of the olden Sakalava kings. Then they were in the north road and speeding out toward the mangrove swamps that bordered the coast, and all was clear behind them.

FOR a few kilometers they had good road. The general mourned his decorations, his personal effects, his souvenirs; then he grew firmer, and age dropped from him. Renouf had lost more than such things, having left wife and children at the capital.

"This is what matters most," he said, patting the briefcase on his knees. "This holds everything the British intelligence wants. Who knows now what will happen? The Japs may come in force, an expedition may come from South Africa, there may be riot and mutiny, death and prison—but this must reach Trenchard."

"Still hours away and not yet at sea," said Jacqueline. "It is barely five-thirty now. Ralph, we must get as far as possible before dark! It is a terrible road and your lights may betray us."

Cartier nodded. She called him Ralph; the others, Raoul. To them he was French, but she knew better. He gave her a look, caught up her hand, and pressed his lips against it.

"Brave heart! We'll make it."

The road ended. With only twenty miles to go, they now had to follow a rude wagon track by swamp and hill. In the

sunset light the red cliffs, the red earth, bore an ominous hue. The car jounced and rocked interminably; talk was impossible.

They all were fully aware of the same thing. There was no escape for them, except by sea. If the Indian lugger failed to take them off, they were lost. They were utterly dependant now upon the unseen, the unknown, Trenchard.

By native huts, by mangrove tangles, by stretches of open shore where a few Sakalava fishermen hung nets, the car bounced along. To their right lay high hills running to the distant mountains—red hills, red earth, red rocks. To their left was the sea, spouting, jetting, curling foam; all this coast was thickly fanged with coral reefs for miles from shore, reefs uncharted and unknown in part, dreaded with a deathly horror by mariners. The Outer Reef ran, with various breaks, from ten to thirty miles offshore.

The sky greened gradually, after the sun was gone. Cartier had traveled this road once, when he first came out; none of the others knew it. He held on while it was light enough to see their way, until pinpoint stars began to twinkle over the red hills.

"Might as well finish the job now," he announced. "Might be too risky showing car lights later, as you say, Jack. I've a flashlight in the pocket, luckily. Not far now."

They held on; the road became vile, a mere track used by the native woodcutters who supplied the city's firewood. The tide was out, and the final stretch of road plunged them among mangrove swamps. From these and from the exposed shore and bared reefs ascended pestilent odors; the sea breezes had dropped completely, as it usually did at nightfall, this monsoon.

And here was the end; a tiny exposed cove of white coral sand. The car lights touched upon a stack of cut wood. Boats put in here to carry the wood down to Mojanga, but all was deserted now. The engine stopped; the smell of fish and kelp drifted from the reefs.

"All out; end of the line!" cried Cartier. "It's a short quarter-mile along the shore to the inlet. Might as well stay here in comfort until the last minute."

The lights were shrouded, the basket of food was lifted out and they grouped around it. The wine was opened; the hastily assembled tins and bread were made ready. Sitting in the car or lounging in the sand, the five relaxed, ate, drank, smoked. The lights were doused and Cartier threw the car key into the swamp.

"No Japs running this car!" said he, and with a lump of coral rock smashed in the radiator and screen.

They waited through the hours. Currents boiled among the reefs; the tide was setting in; stirred to life, the water was luminous and ghostly with pale phosphorescent glimmerings. Gentle airs stirred the trees; the breeze of the southeast monsoon was lifting, and would increase steadily until the following noon, when the sea breeze would begin to come up. The old general, with Jacqueline huddled against him, dozed by fits and starts. The three younger men talked; the sea horizon remained blank.

"Close to eleven," announced Cartier, after a glance at his watch. "Trenchard may arrive before or after midnight. We'd better get along."

The pathetically little luggage was got out and shared, they went down to the shore and began the last traverse, Cartier in the lead. He would not risk the flashlight, but the stars blazed high, and even with the flood tide in they had little difficulty.

The inlet showed ahead; this would mean a break in the Outer Reef, a safe enough entrance for their ship. They clumped down in the white sand, staring seaward; here in truth was journey's end. The mere fact that they were here safely, poised on the dark sea-edge, broke the ten-

sion, flooded them with relief unutterable. Madagascar was slipping over and over the horizon behind them. The life there was closed and gone; the luminous seahorses tumbling in from Africa spelled hope and new life and future.

"Even without binoculars," said Jacqueline, "one would think that the ship would be visible, the starlit night is so clear!"

"Distances are deceptive," said Renouf, as though chiding the quivery fear behind her words. "Phosphorescent water, especially. You'd never guess how hard it is to land a seaplane on such water, at night!"

"Why didn't you fly away, *mon vieux?*" Raimond asked him.

The air captain laughed. "We haven't many planes at best. What we have are guarded jealously. Remember Henri Espinasse? I think you met him last fall. He thought he could make it, an hour before dawn. He was riddled as he was climbing into the cockpit. Poor Henri!"

"When was this?" asked Cartier.

Renouf passed a hand across his brow. "When? This morning. At the Ivato field, twelve kilos north of the capital. That was when I skipped out. I wasn't alone then. I am now. At least, reached Mojanga alone. This morning? It seems a year, a century ago! Once aboard this boat, once Trenchard has this *portefeuille*, I can sleep—perhaps."

Cartier pointed the flashlight seaward and showed the light, three times. It had taken Renouf all this while before he could speak of the morning's happenings at Tananarive. The entire story would be slow to come out.

"Are there many like us, I wonder?" he asked. "Getting away?"

"There won't be many left to try, this time tomorrow!" said Raimond Gros bitterly. "Up at Hellville, at Nosi Bé, a group meant to try for it; if not too late, they may make it. They had a boat and a quick-firer. They meant to blast their way—"

His voice died. Everyone heard it at once; an eerie cry from the water, lifting above the soft reiterant thunder of the surf.

"Ashore there! Show your light again!"

A wild heart-jump of a thrill, a mad pounding of temples and pulses; Cartier obeyed. The call came again.

" 'Kyou! Right. Give us your names."

"General Gros, his son and daughter, Captain Renouf, Ralph Cartier," responded the American. "All clear here."

"Right. Stand by."

INCREDIBLY, a boat appeared, a small boat; why it had not been seen earlier was a mystery. A reef, of course, had concealed it. Massing blackly on the starlit water, it came in with swirls of light streaming behind as oars dipped. Swerving around the point of the inlet, it swung in where there was no surf. Figures jumped out and hauled it up. A trim, small shape in white stepped unhurried to the sand to greet them as they rushed at it; not a large man, he was wearing a uniform, English, no doubt. Hard to tell in the starlight.

"Trenchard?" exploded Cartier.

"Right." The Englishman shook hands. "Evening, everyone. Get in, Miss. No time to lose here. Ah, General! Glad to see you, sir. Heard you'd been arrested."

"Where's your ship?" demanded Renouf, pressing forward.

"Out there. Renouf! Have you brought what I wanted?"

"Here, take it!" Renouf broke into a spasmed laughter; sheer hysterics. He shoved the briefcase upon the Englishman. "Here, here it is!"

"Right. Now in with you, all hands." Calm, quiet, unexcited, the English voice drenched them all with coolness. "That's a filthy little cattleboat, y' know. There's one of your corvettes or gunboats somewhere around; I came in with the small boat to avoid risks."

The luggage was tumbled in, they tumbled after it, crouching together. The boat was run out, the oars lifted and dipped,

Trenchard was at the tiller. The rowers were brown men, Arabs or lascars. Cartier reached out and found Jacqueline's hand; it was cold, cold as ice, but her fingers pressed his tightly.

MAGICALLY, they were pulsing through the phosphorescent water. And suddenly Cartier realized vaguely why they had been able to see nothing of any ship. Why, here was distance! These reefs were vast stretches; the starlit sea was endless, illimitable; darkness closed down so shortly that now the shore was invisible.

"I barely got out of port," Trenchard was saying. "No end of rumors and so forth. Riots in the city; troops moving in, they say. A chap warned me that armed patrol boats are out to watch the coast and Outer Reef against native boats makin' off. Thought we saw lights, just before I started in from the ship. May be nip and tuck yet."

"Are you going to Zanzibar?" Cartier asked.

"No chance. Headin' straight across for Mozambique; we'll meet a patrol ship over there and trans-ship you chaps. That is, if! Glad I'm able to stop playing half-breed Arab, anyhow. Hasn't been a pleasant job by half."

They sped on and on. Upon Cartier, these words loosed a glimpse of the truth; this man had been under the greatest strain and tension of them all, pretending to be what he was not, a spy in enemy territory, waiting there deathlessly to take off these few people and the promised documents. And he had mentally termed this unknown savior a whiskey-swilling old brokendown seaman! He laughed to himself, sharply.

Suddenly Trenchard leaned forward. His voice lashed at the men with imperative urge; he was speaking Swahili. His words were lost, but the tone was urgent. The oars bit deeper, the boat trembled and surged anew.

"Lucky thing," Trenchard observed, with deadly calm, "we had time to break out our hidden gun after we left port. Down low, everybody. Down!"

"I can see nothing," said Jacqueline. "Has he cat's eyes, this Englishman?"

Trenchard understood the words and made response, as the group shrank down.

"Seaman's eyes, Miss. We're in for it. Damn those patrol boats! If we reach the ship, I'll give 'em a lesson—"

It was unreal, to Cartier. He heard a voice from the water, a thin, alarmed voice; then whistling, shrieking things flew overhead, and no one needed to be told to duck. A burst of reports split the night; a vicious rat-tat-tat of explosions.

The man at the stroke oar gave a grunting moan and pitched down headlong from the thwart, his oar hanging. Cartier scrambled in heart-hurried, frantic movement. He was on the thwart, he had the oar, he was swinging the heavy ash in unison with the others.

"Good man," came the unemotional, quiet voice. It thrilled him strangely, joyously.

Explosive French voices were crying out upon the night, not close by but from two points. Now Trenchard spoke again.

"They've not found us; that was sheer luck. Two of 'em. We're under shelter of a reef now. One more dash and we'll make it."

As he worked, Cartier strained to see; he could see little. A spurt of red flashes leaped in the darkness. No mistake or luck about it this time. Bullets whined and whistled; there was a splintering crash forward and the bow man cried out something. His oar trailed, but Cartier could not turn to look. Like the others, he was throwing everything he had into the work, pulling his heart out. That calm, unexcited voice from the sternsheets held them all to it. Until, abruptly, Trenchard flung up his head and called vibrantly.

Voices made response. The ship! The slatting of her cordage, the slap of her canvas, came like a blessed breath from heaven. And then, just upon this burst

of relief, white radiance filled the air and was gone, swept up and away, swept back again.

Trenchard cursed. "All right!" he called. "Ready, everyone! The ladder's out. You first, Miss—"

Bullets were whining in the air, but nowhere close. Above loomed a vessel's side; her upper works, her sails, were outlined against the night as by magic in a white glare. Cartier realized that a searchlight had found her, had steadied upon her. But the boat had come in under her dark side, safe from the light.

"Everybody up!" said Trenchard. "Cartier, no time to look after you; get your people into the hold forward. Safe from bullets there. The hatch is off. Keep out of the crew's way."

Jacqueline, who understood English, made response. She was helping her father to his feet. Then she was on the ladder and going up nimbly.

Some went by ladder, others went by ropes; Trenchard caught the hand of a man leaning over the rail above, and was up like a monkey. The ship was a little craft, a Hindu trader; her rail was not high above the boat. Luggage was tossed up. Cartier stooped over the hurt rower, tried to stir the man; the man was dead, and he desisted.

He gained the deck; white light flooded it. He got Renouf and the old general and Raimond headed below, with Jacqueline. A man coughed and threw out his arms and sprawled in a heap beside him. Bullets again. Canvas was going up, an engine below had started to roar, and the water a hundred yards away suddenly flew into a bursting explosion that jetted up a spout of foamy cream in the radiance.

THE calm voice drew Cartier forward. There he found Trenchard, with a group of men working at something in the bow. The ship was moving, was heeling over. The object came clear; a gun. It exploded with a rocking roar; it began exploding quickly. Trenchard was aiming it, was handling it; the brown men around him knew what they were doing. He threw up his hands and stepped away from it with a sigh, and almost collided with Cartier.

"Oh, hello!" he said. "All over. Got 'em both—damned little patrol craft!"

"What?" exclaimed Cartier. "You mean, all clear?"

"Come along aft. You've earned it."

Trenchard was in a hurry. Cartier hurried with him, aft to where a brawny man stood at the helm. In the air came a whine, a burst of fire, whistling voices of death that struck all around.

"Better cover up, Cartier," said Trenchard calmly.

"Be damned to it," said Cartier, though fear hammered in his heart. "I can stick if you can. Anything I can do?"

"No, thanks. That must be a corvette or gunboat. Her light's got us; she can pound us hard, but she can't reach us. She's in among the reefs and we're clear and making speed. Far too much speed for her."

"But she's shelling us!" cried Cartier.

"Quite so. Damned awkward but can't be helped. Our little gun wouldn't reach her. Better take cover."

The deck and spars were clearcut and distinct as in daylight. Up forward, above the bows, blossomed a fiery rose; the shell-burst sent screaming particles everywhere. Holes appeared in the canvas. Lines were cut; yard and sail came down to deck with a crash. A dozen men swarmed around, leaped into the rigging; the canvas went up anew.

The ship reeled; Cartier was all but knocked from his feet as a shell burst in the cabins directly below. Another overhead; this time he went sprawling, unhurt, but as he came up he saw the brawny man lying on the deck and Trenchard at the spokes. He went to him.

"I can steer a bit," he said. "At least, hold her steady."

"Take her," said Trenchard, and Cartier obeyed. "Keep her as she is."

He did this, until another brown man came running aft and took his place. Then he looked at Trenchard. In the white light, the brown, compact features struck out at him, but the cap was gone, knocked away. Cartier caught his breath, and Trenchard looked down at his hand, then up at Cartier again, and nodded.

His fingers were all red and dripping bright blood.

"Bit of a scratch," the captain said calmly, wiping his fingers on a handkerchief. More blood came down from his arm. "Rather necess'ry to keep on the job just now. I fancy another five minutes will see us in the clear—"

A shellburst stopped his words. Deck and rail amidships leaped into a blaze of smoke, the fire invisible in the white radiance. Another shellburst exploded above. Men were already working at the fire. Trenchard stood watching and directing them.

"But we'll be blown to pieces!" cried Cartier. "We simply can't take it like this!"

"We must," Trenchard said inflexibly. "It's quite all right, old chap, believe me!"

It was not all right. Down below came another explosion, and the ship quivered like a hurt animal. It was good shooting; those Frenchmen had the range perfectly. A deckhouse with a boat in chocks beside it, thirty feet away, dissolved in a bursting roar. Splinters flew everywhere; one rapped Cartier over the head and knocked him against the rail, dazed and half senseless. He clung there, furious, helpless, cursing that deadly revealing light, waiting for the next burst of death.

It came, but well astern. Another came after it, also astern. The white radiance disappeared; black darkness engulfed everything.

"I say, Cartier!" That was Trenchard's voice. "Better get your crowd up here. We could do with a bit of help. Quite a few hurt men."

Cartier did not answer. He was blinking at the darkness. Trenchard approached him.

"It's all over, y' know. Not hurt?"

"No. You did it, you did it!" Cartier exclaimed thickly. "I never thought we'd make it—"

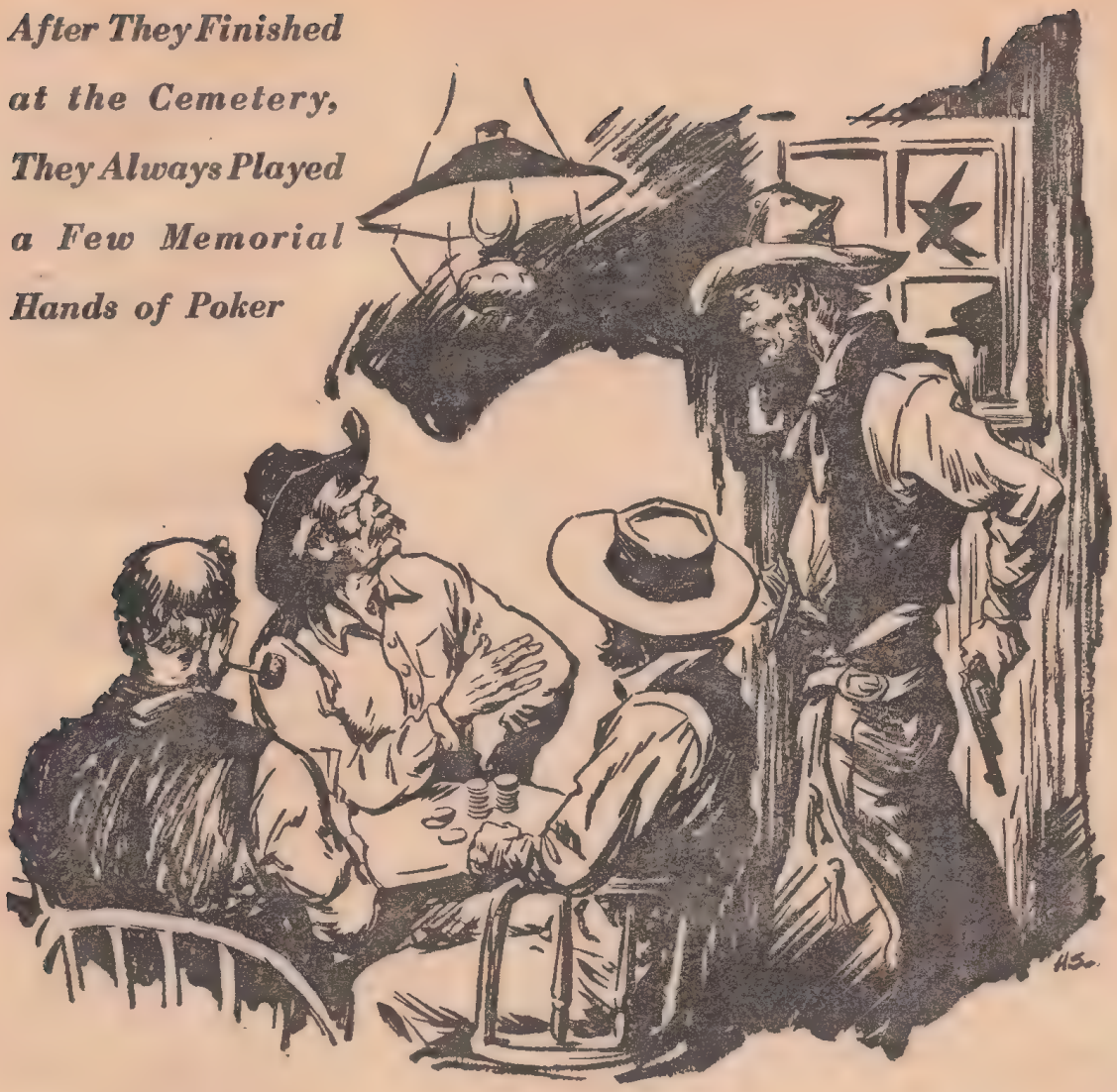
"Keep your head, old chap. Look here, I'll tell you something," said the Englishman. "Before morning, there'll be a fleet of our ships here—coming to attack Mojanga and seize the whole island. No blinking funny work this time, but a complete grab. And these papers you fetched along are just what we need. Now get your people, will you?"

"Lord!" said Cartier. "Trenchard, you did it—you're a wonder!"

"Nothing extro'nary, old chap. All in the night's work, as it were."

Cartier went forward dazedly. It was all over. Nothing extraordinary about it; the same sort of thing was going on all over the world—all in the night's work, whether by land or sea or air. But for him and for these others, the sinister red hills of Madagascar were gone forever.

After They Finished at the Cemetery, They Always Played a Few Memorial Hands of Poker



In Memory of Lobo Jones

By W. C. TUTTLE

Author of Many Famous Western Stories

HE WAS an old man on a horse, traveling an old desert road in the moonlight; just a moving figure, going in and out of the shadows of the Joshua-trees and tall saguaros, the streaks of moonlight glinting on the tarnished silver of his old chaps, spur-chains jingling softly to the scruff of his horse's hoofs on the sand.

This used to be a pretty good road, he reminded himself. Maybe they built a new road to haul the silver out of Galena City. Maybe the town had grown, maybe changed. But of one fact he was certain. Judge Blake, Al Schelling, the prosecutor, and Con Orum, the sheriff, would be there. The old man licked his thin lips in anticipation.

It was over this same road they had taken him to a railroad, where he was shipped to the penitentiary. He could re-

member every detail of that trip. The sheriff sitting beside him, driving the buckboard team, while two armed guards sat on the back seat. He could even remember the color of the horses, details of the harness. One front wheel was slightly out of line, he remembered.

They had seen a huge flock of buzzards, circling overhead, and had remarked that for the first time in his life he'd change places with a buzzard. The sheriff had laughed and told him that was the last flock of buzzards he would ever see. But he had told the sheriff, just what he had told the judge and prosecutor, that he would come back and feed them all to the buzzards.

That was thirty-five years ago. Thirty-five years. He was sixty now. Lobo Jones, the best rider, best pistol shot in the desert was an old, old man at sixty—and didn't know it. After he had been in the penitentiary about a year Lobo Jones engineered a jail-break, in which other men got away, but all Lobo Jones got was a bullet through his lungs. He was mistakenly reported dead. But Lobo Jones was tough, and he beat the Grim Reaper. When he came back from the hospital to his cell, little remained of the old Lobo, except his crooked grin and a gleam of hate in his gray eyes.

Time meant nothing to him. The days, months and years were all alike. He had only one ambition and that was to get out and kill those three men, who had sent him to prison for killing a man he did not kill. At least, he didn't believe he did. He had been pretty drunk that night. Lately he hadn't been able to do much work. The sawbones at the hospital said he had a bad heart.

Things had not changed at the hospital. As far as Lobo Jones was concerned, time had stood still. But he was a free man now; free to get even with the three men who had sent him away. The Joshua-trees seemed to nod to him as he rode along toward the rim of the mesa, straining his eyes for his first glimpse of Galena City.

There would be the long slope, where the freight-wagons labored to the top of the mesa, and at the bottom would be Galena City. He drew rein at the top and looked down the slope, silver and blue in the moonlight. He could see a dark mass, which must be Galena City, but there were no lights. That was queer. It was short of midnight, and Galena City was an all-night town.

A desert coyote crossed the road ahead of him, as he spurred down the slope. Near the bottom he drew his horse to a walk. On the left-hand side was the old cemetery. He could see the white markers amid a tangle of desert growth.

IT didn't look very well-kept. He remembered that it required a lot of work to make that cemetery, and he wondered that they let it go back to the desert so soon. However, it meant little to Lobo. He'd give them a chance to put up three more markers very soon.

Then he rode into the main street of Galena City, where the empty, false-fronted buildings, sagging and fallen away, echoed to the thump of his horse's hoofs. He drew up and tried to realize things. It was impossible for him to understand.

There was the Galena City Bank on the corner. The sidewalk was gone from in front of it, the windows gone, only one sagging door left. And on the other corner was the Empire Hotel. But the porch had fallen away, and an outside balcony, where he had sat many times, was sagging almost to the street. Just beyond was the Silk Hat Saloon, with its big gambling parlor and honkatonk. Why, there was only part of the front and one crumbling wall left!

It made Lobo Jones dizzy. He got off his horse and tied the animal to what was left of a hitch-rack, and sat down on a piece of the old sidewalk, which swayed under his meager weight. It was all beyond

the understanding of Lobo Jones; more nightmare than reality.

Then he saw a light. Across the street in what used to be a small saloon, he could see a light through a broken window. Slowly he got to his feet and started across the street. He shoved the door open. The light came from a back room. He heard the sound of voices, the click of poker-chips on a table.

With the stealth of a hunting cat Lobo Jones moved to that doorway. It was a small room. Three men were seated around a poker table, playing by the light of a lamp. They were all elderly men, roughly dressed.

The man facing him, white-haired, with heavy brows and a wide, thin-lipped mouth, lifted his head and saw Lobo Jones. The other two glanced around quickly. The man said pleasantly:

"Enter, stranger. Welcome to Galena City."

Lobo Jones moved forward. He couldn't recognize any of these men. He stood near the table, his right hand behind him.

"Sit down," said one of the men, indicating a chair. Lobo shook his head.

"Prospector?" asked one of them.

Lobo nodded slowly. "The town," he said huskily, "must have moved—kinda."

The man with the heavy brows laughed.

"Yes," he said, "it moved—kinda."

Lobo nodded. "Everybody gone—but you three," he said. "What are you doin' here?"

"Well, it is rather a long story, my friend. We lived here in the heyday of Galena City; the days when millions in silver made this a boom-town of the first water. But the mines played out finally, and Galena City became a ghost-town."

Lobo Jones drew a deep breath, but his eyes never wavered.

"Years ago," continued the white-haired man quietly, "we three were responsible for sending an innocent man to prison. We were sure of his guilt. A year later we were told that he died in prison. Less than a year later a gambler was shot in a gun-fight, and before he died he confessed to that murder.

"You can imagine how we felt, my friend. It was a terrible blow. Perhaps we are just three sentimental old fools, but we got together, bought a fine marble monument, had it engraved, and set it up in the cemetery. There is no body under that stone; but the grave is there—in memory of the man we wronged. Once a year we come out here and polish the stone, repair that fence and place flowers on the empty grave. It was the least we could do. After we finish at the cemetery, we play a few hands of poker in memory of what used to be Galena City. Now, my friend, you understand."

Lobo Jones drew another deep breath. After a moment, he asked huskily, "Wh—what name's on that tombstone?"

"We didn't know his right name," replied the man slowly. "We put on what folks called him—Lobo Jones."

Lobo Jones' eyes blinked rapidly, and he seemed to have difficulty in getting his breath. Something thudded on the floor, and they saw the big Colt revolver. Then Lobo seemed to reach for support, but fell sprawling toward the table.

The three men were out of their chairs, bending over him. One of them kicked the gun aside. The white-haired one said, "Gentlemen, I give you—Lobo Jones."

The three of them looked at each other.

"You recognized him, Judge?"

"Instantly," replied Judge Blake.

Con Orum, former sheriff, picked up the big gun and placed it on the table, shaking his head, as he said:

"After thirty-five years he came back to make good his threat."

Al Schelling, the lawyer, sat on the edge of their poker-table and looked at the huddled figure on the floor.

"Well," he said quietly, "it busts up our deer hunt, gentlemen; but I'd like to take off my hat to Judge Blake — the best damned impromptu liar I ever heard"

Blitz at Blizzard Bay

By LESLIE MacFARLANE

I

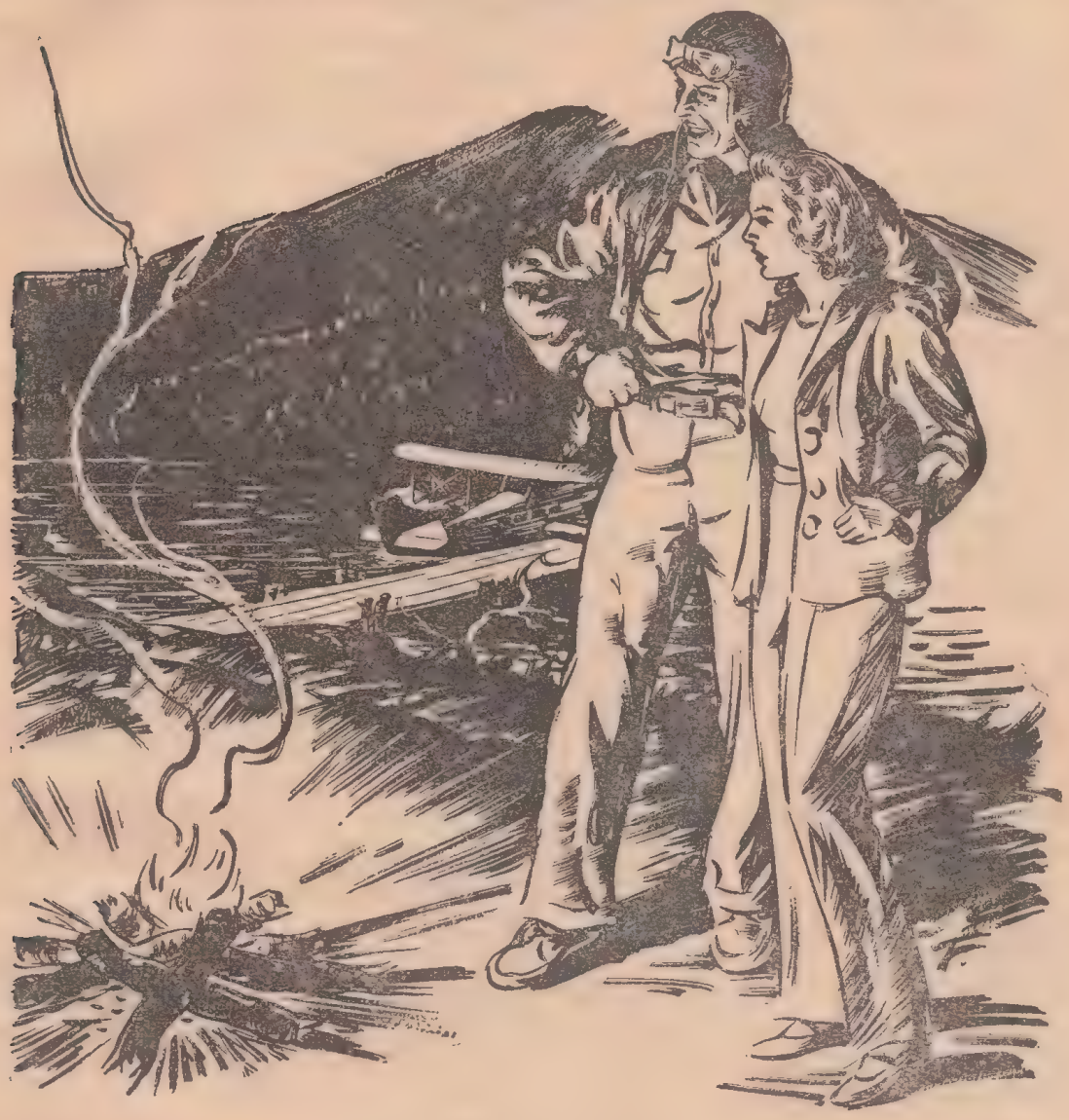
THESE saboteurs tried it by air. It must have been a tricky flight, full of risk, for they came by the Arctic. Perhaps there was a pre-war fuel cache in Ungava but in any case it did them no good. Counter-espionage worked smartly, bagged the crew before they had been forty-eight hours in Canada.

On the griddle one of the Nazis seemed to think his mates in another plane had also fallen into the net. That was a slip. It set things humming. At a Royal Canadian Mounted Police outpost in the Nipigon country an inspector pieced bits and snatches of information together and studied a map of his bailiwick. His phone had been ringing. He called in a bush pilot.

"You're flying Nurse Glenn to Fort Lookout today?"

"Yeah. Got to drop in at Blizzard Bay with supplies for Matt Heath and Steve Kingston first. May stay there overnight and go on to Lookout in the morning." The pilot's name was Joe Flannery. He

Why Should the War Get Me Down? I Never Think About It, Never Talk About It. I Suppose It's Still Going On?



knew his job and he didn't waste words. "Why?"

The inspector told Flannery about the saboteurs, who were still at large.

"They're key men. Sent over to direct sabotage units. They could do a lot of damage if they got loose. We've got to know what happened to them." His hand swept the map. "Keep your eyes peeled and your ears open. There's a chance they may have been forced down up there."

His gesture encompassed a wilderness as his fingertips skimmed the maze of waterways in the Albany and English River country. One of the blue splotches on the map was marked Stormy Lake and there was a bay at the southern end—Blizzard Bay.

That was where Flannery would call on his way north with Kay Glenn. Where Heath and Kingston lived. Everyone knew Heath and Kingston. Prospectors. A team famous from Chibougamau to the Barrens.

"Your Nazis probably cracked up," said Flannery. "I hope they fried. If I find 'em starving to death I'll thumb my nose at 'em and fly away."

"GERMANS?" bellowed Matt Heath scornfully. "Germans in the Stormy Lake country? Flannery, you've gone crazy."

He poured himself a tin cupful of the clear dynamite Flannery had brought in with the supplies, and tossed it down neat. "Crazy!" he repeated.

Enthroned on a bleached log, the great Matt Heath was, as always, a picturesque figure in the glare of the campfire. The balding head, the shaggy brows, the deep-set eyes, the magnificent beard once fiery red but now turning to patriarchal gray—he looked like a flannel-shirted old prophet.

Steve Kingston, sprawled on the sand in the shadows, was watching the nurse's face in the dancing light. A cool face, young and serene. But unsmiling. She was a slim, competent girl in blue slacks and a vivid red jacket—a blonde nurse with violet eyes. The first white woman he had seen in months. Woman hunger had stirred in Kingston when he saw her get out of the plane. He was twenty-five—a tall, brown, taciturn fellow, slow-smiling and soft-spoken—and it was characteristic that he wasn't beside her now, but on the other side of the fire—in Matt Heath's shadow.

Kingston had been in Matt Heath's shadow for a long time. Ever since the famous Heath picked him up as a lanky youngster in his 'teens—he was guiding in the Temagami country then—and made a prospector out of him. The partnership had been a great success. The bush fraternity knew them as a famous team. Heath—the man who knew rock, the man who staked the Golden Bell and led the Dancing River rush, the man who had money in the bank and went on living in the wilderness regardless, the legendary Matt Heath who read books and had his own ideas on everything under the sun. Oh, a character, Matt Heath!

And Kingston, the dead shot, the expert bushman, the quiet-voiced, easy-moving junior partner. Nothing odd or eccentric about Kingston—not yet. But give him time.

"You don't believe in my Nazis, then?" grinned Flannery.

"No!" The firelight danced on Matt Heath's beard. "You fellows outside hear too much war talk. You see Germans behind every tree. It's getting you down."

Kay Glenn's clear voice came across the fire.

"Doesn't it get you down sometimes, Mr. Heath?"

Kingston was a little puzzled because the girl seemed unimpressed by Matt Heath—even a little withdrawn and hostile.

"The war?" replied Heath blandly. "Why should it get me down? I never think about it. Never talk about it. Never hear about it. I suppose it's still going on?"

Flannery's mouth flew open. Kingston grinned. He watched for the look of shocked amazement on the girl's face but she accepted the outrageous remark quite calmly.

"You're just not interested," she said.

"How do you mean you don't hear about it?" blurted out Flannery. "You can hardly turn on the radio without—"

"Haven't got a radio. Wouldn't have one around the camp. We're free of the war up here, so why get a machine to bring it in. So far as Steve and I are concerned," beamed Matt Heath, "there just isn't any war."

"That," said the girl quietly, "must be just dandy for you both."

"It's perfect." Matt Heath stroked his beard. "All men are brothers," he said, gazing into the fire. "I've always been taught that and I've always believed it. War is wrong. I'll have no part of it. I'll have none of it in my camp."

The girl glanced across the fire at Kingston. He felt a little uncomfortable under her calm, impersonal gaze.

"And you?"

"I string along with Matt." He didn't want to tell her he had never given the war

much thought. As Matt Heath said, they never heard about it, never talked about it. The whole business seemed very remote, like something happening on another planet. Kingston knew Matt Heath's views by heart and Matt Heath, of course, was right. Kingston simply took Matt Heath's rightness for granted. Matt Heath had brains; he was a thinker and a wise man; he stacked up head and shoulders over anyone Kingston had ever known.

"Suppose those saboteurs did crash up in this country," said Flannery. "Just suppose they walked in here—brought the war in here anyway. You'd fight then, wouldn't you?"

"It wouldn't be necessary," said Matt Heath benignly. "I'd feed them and give them shelter, treat them the same as anyone else."

"Germans?"

"Brothers. Strangers. Why would I hate them? Hatred breeds hatred. I'd be kind to them and they couldn't fight me because you can't fight anyone who is kind to you."

There was an exclamation from the girl. She stood up.

"I never heard such childish nonsense." She smiled her contempt at them both. "When I came here and saw two big, able-bodied men shut away from the world I was very curious. And now I know. But the answer wasn't worth finding out. A couple of ostriches!"

She turned away from the fire. Then looked back and shot over her shoulder at the benevolently smiling Heath:

"All men are brothers? Then how about your brothers the Russians and the Chinese, the Poles, the Czechs, the Greeks? How about a brotherly hand for them instead of hiding out up here with your eyes shut and your ears plugged?"

Her scornful eyes flicked Steve Kingston's face.

"As for you, young man, your trouble is that you're all doped up with the gospel according to Saint Heath. You've been out of the world so long you've forgotten thinking men outside. Good night!"

She strolled off into the shadows, the few paces to the guest cabin. The door opened and shut quietly.

"Boy!" murmured Flannery. "That's telling you fellows!"

Matt Heath shook with tolerant, chuckling laughter. He poured himself another drink, passed the bottle.

"I like that sort of a girl," he said. "Speaks her mind. She's very young. Full to the brim with ideals and patriotism." He tossed off his drink. "She's very young."

He made Kay Glenn's outburst seem amusing and a bit silly, like the petulancy of a child.

But on Kingston it had registered.

II

KINGSTON slept little that night.

He couldn't get Kay Glenn out of his head. Girls had played small part in his life but here was one who stirred him and it seemed very important that she should think well of him. But she didn't. She despised him.

He couldn't forget the contempt in her voice. *A couple of ostriches—hiding out up here with your eyes shut and your ears plugged.*

Those things she said about the Czechs and the Poles and the Greeks—*thinking men outside*—and the way she lashed Matt Heath. *You're all doped up with the gospel according to Saint Heath.*

That had been a sharper thrust than she knew. It was the first time, absolutely the first time Kingston had ever heard Matt Heath's judgment questioned. Did people outside really think Matt was an old fool and that he, Kingston, was a young one?

He did a lot of hard thinking before he fell into a restless sleep at dawn. When he wakened he felt different. Older. And he had halfway made up his mind about what he had to do. When a girl like Kay

Glenn despised you—well, you couldn't let it ride.

Kingston wasn't much of a hand for light and easy talk with pretty girls. He was frowning and serious when he managed to get a word with her after breakfast, while Flannery checked the plane. Standing by the canoes on the shore she was dressed for flight, even prettier than she had been in the fireglow, her fine hair stirred by the fresh breeze whipping in from the bay.

"I'm sorry you don't think much of us," Kingston said.

The girl looked up at him. "I'm sorry, too." Her eyes were direct and clear. "You think a lot of Matt Heath, don't you?"

"He's my partner," said Kingston slowly. "Honest, if you knew him like I do—"

"I know him better than you do. He's a character, isn't he? I know the type. The bush philosopher. Different from anyone else you've ever met. Thinks for himself."

Her fingers closed on a fold of his flannel shirt.

"Why don't you grow up? You don't *look* dumb! And yet you gulp down all that Matt Heath hooey and live the life of Riley up here while better men than you are being shot down every second just so you and Matt Heath can stay free. You make me sick!"

And with that she picked up her haversack and went swinging off toward the wharf. Kingston trailed behind, red to the ears.

"Three months before I'll be back," said Flannery, shaking hands. "Be good, you fellows."

Kingston heard his own voice.

"Could you stop in tomorrow—on your way back from Lookout?"

Flannery stared.

"I hadn't figured to. But of course, if there's any special reason—"

"I'd like you to pick me up. I want to go outside."

"What's this?" demanded Matt Heath. "Outside?"

"I'm going out to enlist," muttered Kingston. Then he looked Matt Heath in the eye. "I'm sorry, Matt. I don't mean to let you down. But I guess I'd better pull out."

A flat silence. Flannery saw there was a lot under the surface here. He cocked a speculative eyebrow at Kingston.

"Sure—I'll come in," he said, and then jumped down onto the float. A minute later the plane roared across the ruffled water. Kingston saw a patch of red jacket in the cabin window, the gesture of a slim hand. The plane rose, skimmed out over the wooded island, then droned north.

He turned to Matt Heath.

"Matt, I—"

The big bearded man towered in front of him—gigantic, high-booted, shaggy-browed, thumbs hooked in belt.

"I picked you up," boomed Matt Heath, "when you were a fuzz-faced punk who didn't know a tumpline from a frying pan. I taught you the bush. I taught you rock. I taught you all you know." Matt Heath spat tobacco juice on the wharf. He made it seem as if he wanted to get the taste of Kingston out of his mouth. "And just when I'm by way of making something out of you, along comes a blonde all bug-eyed with patriotism and noble thoughts, and you walk out on me."

"Matt, it wasn't just her. I got thinking—"

"To hell with you!" bawled Matt Heath, and strode back up the wharf to the beach.

THEY were through.

Kingston knew that. Finished.

Flannery had brought in dynamite with the supplies, so the partners worked that day on a block of claims they had staked back in the hills. But not as a team. That was over. Heath wasn't talking.

In his own mind, Kingston was confused and miserable. He thought of all the things Matt Heath had done for him.

Little pictures of their past comradeship shuttled through his head.

A dozen times he told himself that rather than let Matt Heath down he would stay here at the bay, tell Flannery he'd changed his mind. But always he came back to that decision on the wharf—a decision that hadn't seemed his own at all, that seemed to have been made for him—and he knew he had to go. He had outgrown Matt Heath. Overnight.

The wretched day dragged. The sun settled toward the treetops in the west. Matt Heath tucked the box of dynamite under his arm and trudged off down the trail without a word. Kingston picked up tools, fell in behind.

It was after six when they came out on the hill above the cabin.

Blizzard Bay lay blue beneath. Two miles long, a mile wide, with the island offshore like a green crown perched on the water.

Steep rock cliffs on the eastern shore; on the west a blue-green wall of bush rimmed by a narrow sweep of pebbled shoreline.

Down below, a patch of sandy beach, the log wharf, the two red canoes, the big log cabin back among the trees. The canoe-shed and tool-house. The old original cabin now used as a guest-house.

It was home to Kingston. As pretty and peaceful a spot, as snug a haven as you'd find anywhere on earth—

An explosive grunt from Matt Heath. He stopped.

At the same instant Kingston glimpsed the movement down on the western sweep of the bay.

A man struggled out of the jungle of bush, out onto the open shore.

Then another figure lurched from the dark barrier. And another, who stumbled and fell. Finally a fourth man, a huge fellow with a bundle over his shoulder.

"Visitors!" grunted Matt Heath.

People came to Blizzard Bay once in awhile. Not often. A trapper, maybe—a free trader—a team of prospectors—a few Indians. Or Flannery in his plane.

But they came by water or sky. Never from the bush. Never on foot.

The four men grouped on the shore. One was pointing down the bay. The group broke up. A clump of trees grew close to the water's edge; it hid them for a few moments; then they skirted the trees and came in sight again. Kingston noticed that the big man no longer carried the bundle. The men strung out in single file down the ribbon of each between the blue bay and the wall of trees.

"You don't think—" said Kingston "—those fellows Flannery was talking about—those Germans."

"Don't be a damn fool!" snorted Heath over his shoulder. He lunged off down trail at his great, swinging stride. "These men have been lost. They'll be hungry. Come on."

III

TUNGSTEN is used in hardening steel. It is therefore a war metal of importance. Scheelite, in which tungsten is found, had been the object of their search, they said, up to the time their plane had cracked up on a small lake over to the west. Dr. Hayden Myles, professor of geology at an Eastern university—head of the party. Professor Wade, his assistant. Mac Smythe, the pilot, with a bandaged head as a souvenir of the crash. A kid named Hawkes, a lad of about twenty, was mechanic and handyman.

They ate fried pickerel and bacon as if it was their last meal on earth.

"Until we saw that plane this morning we were very definitely in trouble," said Dr. Myles, reaching for another piece of fish. "Oh, I suppose we'd have worked our way out eventually—there'd have been a search party—but it might have been unpleasant."

He was a tall, spare, abrupt man with sandy hair and bleak gray eyes. Kingston got quite a jolt when he learned this man

was a professor. He always thought professors were doddering old gentlemen in advanced stages of decay. Myles, still this side of forty, was no muddle-headed dreamer. He was crisp and alert, looked as if he could take care of himself. Nor did Wade meet Kingston's ideas of learned men either—he was a burly, shaggy bear of a fellow with three days' growth of beard, and he looked like an amiable pirate.

"Smythe figured it out when we saw that plane," rumbled Wade. "It was climbing. It had just taken off. He worked out an angle and we struck out through the bush."

"Gamble," said Smythe.

Wade banged the round-faced pilot on the back.

"We hit it right on the nose. Smart figuring."

Young Hawkes kept right on eating. A lean boy with long yellow hair that kept tumbling into his eyes.

Matt Heath hovered over them, refilling coffee mugs, tossing more bacon into the frying pan. He was at his genial and expansive best as host. Company two days running was something out of the ordinary at Blizzard Bay.

"That was Flannery's plane you saw. He's a bush pilot. Stayed here last night."

Myles looked up.

"I hope he's coming back."

"Now there," boomed Matt Heath, "is where you're really running in luck. By rights, Flannery wouldn't be back here for three months. But he's coming in tomorrow or next day."

This created a sensation. Professor Wade chuckled that the Lord was indeed looking after His own. Only young Hawkes seemed indifferent to whether the plane arrived next day or next year. He shook the hair out of his eyes and speared another slice of bacon.

"You can thank him—" Matt Heath jerked his thumb in Kingston's direction. His face clouded. "Got a notion to go out and enlist. That's why the plane's coming."

Myles smiled pleasantly at Kingston. "Congratulations."

"Got war fever," grumbled Matt Heath. "Sees Nazis behind every tree. Why he even had a notion you fellows had dropped out of the sky straight from Berlin."

Kingston was embarrassed. The visitors looked mystified.

"What would give you that idea?" boomed Wade.

"It was just from something Flannery said," Kingston wished Matt Heath had kept quiet. "A rumor about some Nazis."

But Heath insisted on telling the story. He told it well, with just enough benevolent irony to make Kingston seem like a gullible fool. "Pipe dream," he concluded.

Dr. Myles rubbed his long chin. "I don't know," he said thoughtfully. "It might be possible. What do you think, Smythe?"

The pilot shook his head.

"Out of the question. They'd be knocked off before they ever got to the coast."

Young Hawkes spoke up for the first time—with his mouth full—and said it was a thousand to one shot. Wade growled that it was just another scare story.

"Sorry to disappoint," he grinned at Kingston. Then he went into a burlesque Teutonic accent. "Ve haff not fly all der vay from der Greater German Reich. *Heil Hitler.*"

He flung up his arm in the Nazi salute, whooping with mirth. They all roared with laughter—Heath loudest of all. He seemed to relish Kingston's embarrassment.

Common sense told Kingston it was ridiculous to suspect these four men of being anything but what they said they were. And he didn't suspect them. They spoke English as well as he did; their story was thoroughly possible and completely plausible.

But Kay Glenn had awakened some-

thing in Kingston. A streak of independence. Matt Heath's acceptance of the strangers wasn't enough now.

Kingston wanted to know what became of the bundle Wade carried when the men emerged from the bush.

THINKING back, he wondered if he had actually seen a bundle at all. The men had been a long distance away.

But Kingston's eyes were good. Life in the bush sharpens observation of detail. He was pretty sure. The men were empty-handed when they reached the cabin; Wade had no bundle. It had disappeared in the few moments the four were hidden by the clump of bushes.

Why?

It was ten o'clock that night before Kingston found a chance to investigate. By that time an impromptu poker game was going on in front of the fireplace; a bottle was circulating and the four guests were enjoying themselves.

Kingston timed it carefully. When the last of his current stack of chips had gone he pushed back his chair.

"Deal me out," he smiled. "I want to put extra blankets in the guest cabin. It's a cold night."

Matt Heath glanced at him sharply. Matt knew the guest cabin was well supplied with blankets. But he didn't say anything. Kingston had a notion that a swift look passed between Wade and Dr. Myles, but no one commented. He went out the back door, picked up his flashlight as he went.

The weather had turned colder. Waves slashed against the wharf before a chilly northwest wind. Clouds scudded across the moon.

Kingston moved swiftly. He didn't want to be absent from the cabin too long. He was a tall shadow loping silently across the beach, up the west shore.

There was probably nothing to it. Maybe he had imagined the bundle. But that tiny grain of doubt irritated him. He wanted to know. Some instinct made him mistrust those four men against all reason.

He didn't use the flashlight until he reached the clump of bushes. The gleam would be seen from the cabin if anyone chanced to look out. Once sheltered by the trees, however, he snapped it on.

A confusion of footprints in the sand. Cold waves breaking on the shore. A brown and green tangle of bush. Bleached bits of driftwood.

No bundle on the beach. He turned the light on the bushes, explored carefully. Nothing.

A faint clatter, back down the beach. Like a rock dislodged by a foot.

Kingston snapped off the light. Waited. Listened.

Nothing but the wind, the beat of the waves, the creak and murmur of the bush.

He edged around the clump of trees and gazed back toward the cabin. Nothing.

Two yellow squares of light marked the cabin windows a couple of hundred yards away.

He went back beyond the bushes, and switched on the light again. This time he explored the underbrush more thoroughly. Finally he straightened up.

He must have imagined the bundle. He was just turning away, just about to switch off the light, when its beam picked out a gray patch between rocks and a weather-beaten log.

He moved closer. It was a patch of canvas.

Kingston knelt, dragged it out of the

hiding place. A canvas bundle, about four feet long, lashed with heavy cord. Beneath it was a small, bulging haversack.

Kingston worked swiftly, unbuckled the haversack first. It contained four thick packages wrapped in oilskin. He hesitated a moment. After all, prying into a guest's baggage—then he undid one of the packages.

Money. A thick wad of bills. Hundreds, fifties. Several thousands in that one roll alone.

Kingston replaced the wrapping, and buckled the haversack again. Why would geologists carry thousands of dollars into the bush? To buy tungsten claims? It didn't add up. The mining business didn't work that way. Then why this money? He unlashed the cords of the canvas bundle, pulled off the covering.

The light fell on the neat, cold ugliness of a machine-gun.

IV

A VOICE broke curtly from the darkness.

"Drop that flashlight and put your hands up."

Kingston jerked his head around. A strong light broke out, shone full in his eyes, dazzled him.

"I have a gun here," said the voice of Dr. Myles, "and I'll have no hesitation about killing you. Stand up."

The voice of Dr. Myles at the supper table had been crisp, a bit whimsical. This voice was cold, with a bite to it. Kingston set his flashlight down. He stood, arms raised.

He could hardly believe it. The unexpected command from the darkness had been a shock, but the implications staggered him. Kingston hadn't really been suspicious of the four men—just uncertain.

Even the discovery of the money and the machine-gun hadn't settled it. But Dr. Myles there on the windy shore, looming behind the glare of the flashlight and covering him with a gun—there was something grimly definite about that.

"You should have left well enough alone," said Dr. Myles. Kingston saw the glint of light on an automatic. "We may as well bring these things back with us." He picked up the haversack. "Carry the machine-gun. Walk ahead of me. And no nonsense. Your life means nothing whatever. Nothing."

Kingston felt a cold-water sensation down his spine. There was an indifference in Myles' tone that was more menacing than any threat. He drew the canvas around the machine-gun, put the bundle under his arm, walked carefully down the shore in the beam of the flashlight. The light advanced before him, illumining every rock and pebble, the froth of breaking waves. Myles followed him in silence.

All the way back to the cabin Kingston tried to figure things out. After all, for that sort of mission, the men would be specially picked. They wouldn't be sent over wearing Nazi armbands and talking with a sausage accent. Perhaps Myles and Wade *were* geologists. Kingston tried guile.

"What are you fellows? Bank bandits or something? What's the idea of the gun?"

Dr. Myles didn't answer him. They reached the cabin. Kingston pushed open the door. Matt Heath, and the other three, glanced up from the table.

"Took you long enough—" Heath began, and then he saw Dr. Myles behind Kingston with an automatic. Matt Heath stood up, puzzled, frowning. Kingston dumped the machine-gun on the floor.

"Found your machine-gun, Professor," he said to Wade. And to Matt Heath he said, "I don't know what these birds are, Matt, but they carry funny baggage."

Wade got up and stepped over to the wall. Kingston noticed that he stood exactly beside the gun rack, with its three rifles and the double-barreled shotgun. He

folded his arms. Dr. Myles closed the door.

"Sit down, Mr. Kingston," he said curtly. It was the voice of a man accustomed to being obeyed. He walked over to Matt Heath.

"We are your guests, Mr. Heath. I do not want unpleasantness. If you are sensible there will be none. But I am forced to take over."

"Take over?"

Kingston spoke up.

"They had a machine-gun parked in the bushes, Matt. And enough dough to start a bank. They're either burglars or Nazis, what's the difference?"

Matt Heath looked dumbfounded. Dr. Myles snapped:

"Soldiers of the Reich. And proud of it!"

THEY were the same four men. But not the same. The crisp, easy-mannered, smiling Dr. Myles had become a commander—inflexible, flinty, efficient. The jolly black-bearded Wade still looked like a pirate, but no longer an amiable one; now he seemed burly and brutish. In the firelight the pilot's face had become hard and sullen. Even young Hawkes had altered; he wasn't a boy any longer, but a harsh, pinch-faced little man with ratty eyes.

Matt Heath sat down heavily.

"This isn't a joke, is it?"

"It is not a joke," said Myles coldly. "Three of our comrades are dead in the plane that crashed. We intend to live. When the plane arrives tomorrow we leave with it. There will be no trouble unless you choose."

Kingston sat down beside his partner. Kingston's heart was pounding. The four pairs of eyes were hostile, contemptuous.

"All right, Matt," he said, "remember what you were saying last night. Be nice to them and they'll be nice to you. Aren't you going to pour the boys a drink?"

Matt Heath didn't say anything. Slowly he studied the four in turn. Dr. Myles turned to the table, picked up the bottle and deliberately poured six drinks. He gestured to the others. They picked up their glasses. He offered one to Matt Heath. To Kingston. They shook their heads.

"Heil Hitler!" Myles said solemnly.

"Heil Hitler!" They chanted. Four glasses clinked.

"Use your head, son," Matt Heath said quietly. "Not a chance."

"So we fold up without a fight," muttered Kingston.

"With four guns on him, does a smart man draw for a gun he hasn't got?"

"I never pretended to be smart."

"Neither did I. But being a hero is no fun if you're dead."

Kingston's glance flickered to the gun rack. The light rifle, third in the rack, was loaded. Wade had moved away from the rack to pick up his drink. Myles had laid the automatic on the table. But young Hawkes was standing in line between Myles and the couch. Myles might hesitate to shoot.

Kingston figured his chances. If he could reach that gun rack, yank the rifle free and make the door to the kitchen in the next step.

He gathered his muscles for a spring. None of this Matt Heath nonsense for him. You didn't let Nazis walk in and take over without making some kickback.

"Matt!" he rasped. "You and I broke up today and it was about time. You fooled me for five years. You're a crazy, muddle-headed old man and if I didn't know you better I'd say you were yellow as mustard. You can play ball with these rats if you like—but as for me—"

Kingston lunged. But Matt Heath had detected that tenseness and Matt Heath was too quick. His arm flung out, hurled Kingston back onto the cot.

The opportunity, if it had been an opportunity, was gone in an instant. Young Hawkes and Smythe hurled themselves

across the room and pounced on him. Myles snatched up the automatic. His long face was icy.

"Very well!" he said harshly. "I warned you. You make your own trouble."

The two Nazis hauled Kingston, struggling, off the cot. Smythe whipped out a length of rope. Expertly the rope snapped around Kingston's wrists. Smythe slugged him in the face. When the rope was tied, his arms pinned, they slammed him back against the wall.

Kingston lunged. Smythe drove a vicious right into his face again. Young Hawkes kicked him in the knee. They rained kicks and blows on him. Kingston reeled, went down. On his knees, spitting blood, a boot crashed into his chest.

Matt Heath was up off the cot. "I won't have this!" he roared at Myles. "I won't have it, you hear?"

Avidly smiling, Myles turned a little, his arm swinging. The flat of the automatic struck Heath across the temple. As he stumbled, Wade reached out, slammed fingers in his beard, yanked Heath toward him. Deliberately, Wade drew back his fist.

Matt Heath went reeling back against the fireplace from a terrific smash in the face. As he gathered himself, shoulders hunched, head moving from side to side like an old bull about to charge, Myles fired almost point blank at him. The bullet chunked into a log just above Heath's head.

"Are you tired of living?" asked Dr. Myles.

Matt Heath blinked under shaggy brows. His shoulders sagged. He touched a hand to his smashed and bleeding mouth.

Dr. Myles sat down, crossed his knees. The automatic covered Heath.

"If there is any further interruption," said Myles, precisely, "I will kill you." He waved to the others. "Proceed with the lesson."

Kingston was reeling to his feet. They closed in on him again. Smash, to the face —smash to the jaw—smash between the eyes—kick—and he was down again. His head lolled. He was gasping. Hawkes kicked him in the ribs. Smythe hauled him to his feet. They propped him against the wall. Kingston was out. His face was an ugly smear.

Dr. Myles was watching intently, with an expression of clinical satisfaction. He permitted his eye to wander for a second. Neither he nor Wade saw Matt Heath's big freckled hand close on the back of a chair beside the fireplace.

It was a big chair, a little too big for a man to lift comfortably with one hand. But Heath was a big man. And strong. He gathered himself.

The chair came up, ponderously. Dr. Myles turned his head swiftly. Not swiftly enough. The chair crashed against him, splintering, knocked him wildly against the table.

The lamp tilted as the table upended under the impact; glass crashed, the light went out and Matt Heath charged berserk across the cabin.

V

IT WAS a long chance to take under the gun but Heath was in surging movement from the moment he gripped the chair. For a precious five seconds he had things his own way.

Wade went down under a swinging smash from the chair Heath wielded as a weapon to clear his path. There was a yell of alarm from Smythe, a screech from young Hawkes. Heath was at the door; he yanked it open, found Kingston, hurled him across the threshold just as Myles' automatic began blazing.

"Back trail!" bawled Heath.

Bullets zinged overhead. There was a flare of burning oil from the lamp. Heath pitched through the door, sent Kingston staggering as they collided in the darkness. Kingston, bruised, battered and groggy, wrists still lashed behind his back,

was grabbed and hauled along. There was howling uproar back in the cabin.

Matt Heath's wild break was the sort of suicidal, thousand-to-one chance that sometimes succeeds by its own insane desperation. The big man pulled and dragged Kingston around the side of the cabin, plunged across the clearing.

It was their own back yard. They couldn't have missed the trail blindfolded.

"The dirty, lowdown, yellow-bellied skunks!" Heath was panting. "Try pushin' us around, would they?"

"Arms!" gasped Kingston. "Get my arms free—"

He stumbled. Heath saved him from falling. "Take cover first," grunted Heath. Branches raked Kingston's face. They plunged up the bush trail, regardless of noise. A beam of light stabbed the blackness in front of the cabin. It probed the clearing.

They thudded up the trail. Kingston was staggering. The beating had taken a lot out of him. Dry branches snapped and crackled. Their escape was marked by an unholy racket but the main thing was to get well into the bush.

Kingston's heart pounded at his ribs; his knees wobbled; his mouth was full of the salty taste of blood. He tripped over a root, sprawled; Heath hauled him to his feet. A knife slashed and hacked at the rope. Kingston felt his wrists free.

"Take it easy," grunted Heath. "Listen—"

They could hear Myles down in the clearing, shouting, "Engel—Engel—" A shrill shout from young Hawkes. Wade's hoarse bellow.

The flashlight gleamed and flickered through the trees.

"This is one game they're not so good at," grunted Heath, breathing heavily. "Come on."

They pushed on up the trail. Quietly. Deeper into the bush.

Dr. Max Miehle—otherwise Myles—saw the uselessness of pursuit. A fish escapes into the sea, a woodsman takes cover in the woods at night—search is futile. He called back his men.

"For this," he barked at young Hawkes—given name Engel—"you will not sleep tonight. On guard at the back."

And to Johann Schmidt, whose father had adopted the name of Smythe in 1915, he said, "You will watch the front door the first hour. Then sleep. Wade will relieve you."

"You don't think they'll come back?" demanded Wade incredulously. "They have no guns."

"We are in enemy country," snapped Myles. "You see what can happen from a moment of carelessness. I take the blame for that. It mustn't happen again." To Hawkes he said, "Keep your ears open and your flashlight ready. Shoot to kill!"

KINGSTON lay among the undergrowth on the hillside in the darkness, his head pillowed in his arms. His battered face was numb with pain, every bone in his body ached, he was limp with exhaustion. Worse than physical pain, however, was the sickening humiliation of the whole business. Dully, he could hear Matt Heath's gruff, grumbling voice. It had been going for a long time:

"—you heard me practically tell 'em we wouldn't make trouble. I figured there was no use. And then they had to go beating you up. What sort of fellows are they anyway?"

Heath seemed honestly puzzled. In his experience white men didn't act like that.

"They're Germans," muttered Kingston bitterly. "Our brothers, remember?"

Heath ignored the crack.

"I don't like bein' pushed around," he said as if talking to himself. "A stranger comes to my place, naturally I make him welcome. More especially if he's lost and in trouble; then he's welcome to all I've got."

"So he pulls a gun on you and that's all right too."

"No. That's bad. But there's no sense being killed just because you're mad. No sense aggravatin' the fellow with the gun. You said things back there, Steve—things that hurt. But if you'd made that jump for the gun rack what good would it have done you."

Kingston didn't say anything. He knew now he'd have been killed before he got halfway across the room.

The patient voice went on:

"But when they beat you up—started pushing us around—well, that was too much."

"So now we hide out like a couple of chipmunks and wait for them to go away?"

A long silence.

"Why no," said Heath. "Flannery is coming here in the plane. He's going to fly right into trouble. Bad trouble. Maybe that girl will be with him. And if those fellows get away from here—what did Flannery say they were? Saboteurs. If they get clear who knows what's going to happen? Trains wrecked, factories blown up—why no, we can't let them go away."

Kingston's head was aching. He tried not to think of the girl.

"No," said Matt Heath slowly, "we've got to wipe these skunks off the face of the earth so they won't go stinkin' up somebody else's cabin."

"You've got plans for that, I suppose?" Kingston's voice was sardonic. "They're not fools. They're smart. We go fooling around that cabin now, we get drilled full of holes."

Matt Heath said:

"I don't blame you for being kind of sarcastic, boy. You had your ideas and I had mine. I guess some of mine were wrong."

Only Kingston could appreciate what this meant. Matt Heath admitting he had been wrong!

"We get drilled full of holes, we get drilled full of holes. Only I've got to be able to look myself in the eye."

Kingston raised himself on his elbows.

"Dynamite," he muttered.

Silence. Then a grunt from Heath.

"Could do."

"Lots of dynamite in the tool-shed," said Kingston thoughtfully. "If we could figure a way—"

"Wait a minute. Let me think."

They knew dynamite, Unpredictable stuff. But unless you handled it just right it couldn't do as much damage as most people thought. Throw a stick through the window with a short fuse? Might work if you were lucky. Plant it outside the door? It mightn't even blow in the door.

"If we could get close enough," said Heath finally, "we could lay some out front. Wire it up. We go back in the bush with a battery and set it off."

"No good unless they were standing right near the stuff."

"They'll be near enough."

"Inside the cabin?" protested Kingston. "It wouldn't do any more damage than a firecracker."

"We'll get 'em outside—"

"But as I said, unless they're right close to a big charge it won't do any good. That is, if the stuff's buried. It might shake them up but I'm blamed if I can see how it would wipe them out."

"Rocks," grunted Matt Heath. "The dead campfire. Put the stuff under rocks, it'll be like a blast of shrapnel."

Kingston couldn't see it.

"How do we get them to come out and sit around a dead campfire in the middle of the night?"

"We heave some through the window. If it works right and blows them to hell-and-gone, that's fine. We don't need our mine. That's our ace in the hole. If plan number one doesn't work out they'll be stampeded anyhow. They'll come out. We're back in the bushes by that time. When they're outside the door we touch off the mine."

The whole scheme sounded shaky, Kingston thought. But he couldn't think up

anything better. They settled the details. The tool-shed first. Matt would take dynamite and fuse, Kingston would be responsible for battery and wire. It would be ticklish work planting the stuff in front of the cabin but they had to take chances. Matt Heath had that figured out too.

"If we're caught, we split up. I'll head for the canoes and try to decoy them away. You stick and try to finish the job."

"You're not putting that over on me," said Kingston quietly. "The man who runs is the fellow they shoot at. I'll pull 'em away and you finish."

"You want the safe job?" said Matt mildly.

"If it was the safe job you wouldn't elect yourself for it."

"I've been giving the orders around here for a long time, boy," growled Heath.

"I've quit taking them. I'm the decoy or I stay here."

They argued it out in low voices, but Kingston was stubborn. Finally Heath grumbled, "Okay then, have it your way."

THEY waited a long time before they made their way carefully out to the trail and down the slope. The middle of the night. They were pretty sure someone would be on guard, but the Nazis were dog-tired when they reached Blizzard Bay. Maybe a couple of them would be asleep.

The wind had died. That wasn't so good. Even a light breeze to stir the trees and the water would have covered small sounds in the bush. Now the stillness was deathly. But they came down to the edge of the clearing without a twig-snap.

From the back, the cabin was in complete darkness. But the Nazis were men at war, in enemy country and Kingston knew they weren't fools. Hidden eyes would be looking out into the clearing front and back.

The door of the tool-house needed oiling. It creaked once. They waited a long five minutes before they went inside. Kingston found the battery and the wire. Matt Heath touched his elbow. They slipped out.

Kingston figured it took them half an hour to skirt the clearing and inch their way, crawling, out into the open in front of the cabin. They watched for a long time, but there wasn't a sound outside the door, no evidence of anyone outside on guard.

Kingston strung the wire under a covering of sand. If anyone came out and went nosing around with a flashlight the wire might be missed and if he and Matt got clear the job might be finished later. Matt Heath, lying flat by the dead campfire, buried the sticks. One by one he groped for rocks, put them carefully over the yellow cylinders. Kingston trailed the wire toward the deep undergrowth by the spring.

So far, it was going better than he expected. Too good. And then he heard a slow, faint creak in the deep stillness, a slight noise that mightn't have meant anything. Kingston froze. There was a long silence. Then a hard white beam of light stabbed out from the cabin window nearest the door.

It probed bright in the dark, right down to the water's edge, shone on the two red canoes, on the end of the wharf. It moved, lit up the sand and pebbles of the beach, edged closer to the dead campfire.

Kingston held his breath. The beam of light swung back, exploring the beach just in front of the door, edged over to the right and to the bush on the far side of the clearing.

Then it swung away over, swiftly back to the campfire, passed over Matt Heath lying flat with his face hidden, swung toward the bushes. Then the light changed its mind, stabbed right back at the black rocks of the fire site. Then Kingston knew Matt had been seen. He heard a curt low voice from the window. Kingston picked up a rock, hurled it hard at the window, lunged forward and ran down toward the water, making all the racket he could.

The flashlight beam was on him now. He was right in its glare. The light danced from the water.

A rifle barked, hard and emphatic. A bullet whined savagely. Not too close. Night shooting is tricky. Kingston raced along the water's edge, round the end of the wharf, trying to pull the chase away from Matt Heath. Now he could hear sharp voices, a rising racket back in the cabin. Then a shout from the back clearing. The quick thud of running feet, a clatter of scattered pebbles.

He ducked, dodged, weaved toward the canoes. The flashbeam lost him for a moment, picked him out again. The rifle whacked noisily again, shredding the night silence. This time the bullet was close.

Kingston reached the canoes. He saw the crimson spit of another rifle flash beside the cabin. Someone had come running around from the back. A door slammed. A man shouted. He grabbed the first canoe, whipped it over, thrust it into the water. The paddles rattled noisily as they tumbled from the thwarts.

Bam! Whinggg!

Bam!

That one chunked into basswood and canvas, ripped into the stern of the canoe. Kingston pushed off, dropped on one knee, snatched up a paddle and stabbed water.

They were running down the beach now. Their whole attention, he figured, was centered on him. They thought they had only one man to deal with. The light canoe shot swiftly out into the bay. The flash-beam hovered, skimmed over gleaming water, shone harshly on the bow. Kingston drove the canoe to the left, then straight ahead. Another shot. High.

Away back behind him, up on the beach, he heard a yell, then the quick, stuttering roar of an automatic, a shout of triumph. He glanced back over his shoulder. A light was gleaming up near the edge of the clearing, near the spring.

That meant they were hunting Matt Heath. The triumphant shout made him uneasy. Maybe Matt had waited too long, gambling with time in a bid to hook up the wiring.

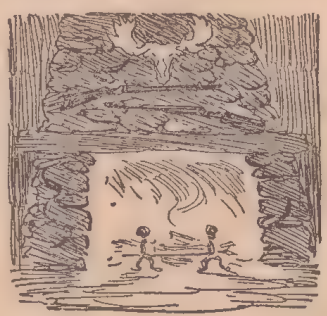
Kingston saw the dazzling eye of the other flashlight at the water's edge. It was full on him. He drove the paddle furiously into the water. The canoe lunged out into the blackness. He drove it out of the beam's range.

Then came the death rattle of the machine-gun.

It blazed lead from the water's edge in a crashing clamor. He heard the whining of bullets over to his left, the spattering splashes in the water. This time he knew he was trapped. The bullets were sweeping toward him in an arc. Kingston bent to his paddle, desperately stroked the canoe toward the eastern shore of the bay. The next instant he felt a terrific blow on the left arm, a bullet whipped past his head. The deadly rain passed on.

He had no strength in the arm. It was numb. The paddle hung useless.

He gripped the paddle low on the shaft with his right hand and tried to paddle that way but the canoe moved sluggishly. He could hear a gurgle of water. Kingston rested the paddle across the gunwales and felt the bottom of the canoe with his good hand. Water. Water pouring in through bullet holes in the fabric.



More shouts on shore. The stuttering crashes of the machine-gun were still echoing from the hills, but the gun itself had fallen silent for the moment. He heard the scrape of a canoe on shingle, looked

back, saw the gleaming light bobbing up and down, sweeping out over the water.

Then he heard the splash of paddles. The light was moving out from shore.

He tried to move his arm. Smashed. Felt his shoulder. Wet. The canoe was very heavy when he tried paddling one-handed again. The other canoe was moving steadily out, the light sweeping the water, brushing the darkness aside, coming nearer.

Kingston leaned far over, tilting the canoe. Water poured over the gunwale. He went over the side, taking a deep breath, and swam. The water sang in his ears. Distantly he heard the harsh clatter of the machine-gun again as the light picked out the red belly of the canoe and screaming lead riddled it.

He swam under water, the dead arm dragging. A man can stay under water a long time when he knows a gasp of air may mean death. He fought to stay under, fought to make headway from that fatal radiance on the surface.

His lungs were bursting, his ears sang. He was driven to the surface and as his head cleared the water he took a vast, quick gasp of air and dove again, with scarcely a splash. In the quick instant he saw the red canoe gleaming in the light, over to his left, heard the clump of paddles, a murmur of voices. But Kingston emerged in blackness. He swam again. He had taken off his heavy boots before leaving the bush and he was glad of that now. The useless left arm was beginning to stab and shoot with pain. Sluggishly, he forged on through the water. He glanced back. The light was moving, but farther away now. He fought his way slowly toward the rocks of the eastern shore.

VI

THE morning sun drove the chill from the air, brought warmth to the wide flat rock on which Kingston lay.

He was naked from the waist; his arm bound with strips from his shirt. The bleeding had stopped now—no artery had been cut—but he had lain there exhausted and motionless all through the dawn. His face was a bruised and blackened pulp from the beating he had taken in the cabin. His body ached with pain.

The rock was far up on the east shore. A screen of poplar shielded it but through the leaves he could glimpse the bay and the wharf and the cabin against the dark wall of bush beyond the clearing.

If he had felt older after Kay Glenn's incisive scorn had broken the snug cocoon that enveloped him in the security and peace of Blizzard Bay, now he felt aged. Not in time but in experience.

The gangling, easy-going young fellow who never thought much of what was going on outside felt as if he had lived a hundred years.

You get trapped by a blizzard on a winter trail and you fight your way through the snow to your cabin—your canoe dumps in white water and you make shore—it is enough then to escape with your hide. That is all that matters. But this was different.

He had come through this and still had his skin. It seemed of little account. What mattered was that he had taken a licking, that he had been whipped and humiliated where he had never acknowledged any outsider as his master. In the bush. On the water.

He thought of Matt Heath, thinking you could ignore a war that was far away. But the war had come right to his doorstep.

When Matt Heath found how wrong he had been he wanted to fight. But it was too late then.

He thought of Flannery, due back in the plane almost any time now. What was going to happen to Flannery? And what was going to happen to a lot of people if that gang of Nazis worked their way out to the south.

And what had happened to Matt? He

pushed that out of his mind. Matt had waited too long.

The big-bearded man on a bush trail—in a canoe—his deep, booming voice by the campfire—the big man who had taught him everything he knew—Matt Heath—gone!

No Kingston thought drowsily, his own skin was of no account now. The only thing that counted was that the curt, long-faced Miehle, the burly Wade, the stolid Schmidt and the ratlike, long-haired Engel had to be stopped. Somehow.

This went beyond all bitterness, all longing to square accounts. It was simply something that had to be done.

If he got a bullet in his skull—well, that would be just too bad. But not important. Not important to anyone but Steve Kingston, who was only one man.

Strength ebbed slowly back into his body with the deepening warmth of the sun.

He did a lot of figuring as he lay there on the rock. The dynamite had probably been found. Almost certainly. And yet that was the only chance he had left. It meant going down from the flat rock, working his way through the bush to the end of the bay, rounding the cabin, coming out close to the clearing on the other side.

Hunting for the battery. The thin wires. If they weren't there, if the ace in the hole was gone he had no cards left.

It was easier, he discovered, to fight that sort of scum early rather than late. That was where Matt Heath had been so completely wrong. Matt Heath's philosophies had blown up in his face.

Play ball with the Nazis! Treat them as fellow-men and hope they'll go away! It didn't work. Not with those fellows.

HE HEARD a steady, distant droning. Very faint at first. From the north. Kingston peered through puffy eyes, searched for the little speck in the cloudless sky.

The droning rose in volume. He saw the plane. A tiny insect.

Flannery was early. He must have left Fort Lookout at dawn. Flannery streaking in to what awaited him at Blizzard Bay.

Miehle and his crew wanted a plane more than anything else in the world. And here was a plane. Their bridge from the deep wilderness to the towns and cities of the south.

The droning grew. The plane took shape. It aimed down at the bay from the sky. Painfully, Kingston got up, moved down from the rock. The arm shot with needles of pain. He felt dizzy and a little sick. He began struggling through the undergrowth.

The roar of the plane filled the air. He saw the ship flash overhead, banking, circling, descending. The clamor echoed.

Kingston worked his way through the bush, on a line with the sweep of the bay. In a clear place among the trees he watched Flannery's plane swinging out over the water, silently heading in now, easing down to the surface. The floats splashed the wave tips, splashed again. The plane settled.

The motor roared sturdily and the ship taxied in.

Kingston pushed branches aside. Now he could see the end of the wharf. Two men waiting there. The others would be watching from the cabin. With guns.

The plane came roaring in toward the wharf. The motor cut out suddenly. The propeller blades flashed and flickered in the sun.

Kingston saw a figure step out onto one of the floats. The red jacket was vivid against the blue water. It hit him in the chest. Like a hammer blow.

Kay Glenn had come back with Flannery!

A ROPE lashed through the air. It was caught by one of the men on the wharf. The plane edged closer. The other man reached down. The girl in the red

jacket leaped lightly up onto the timbers.

Somehow it hadn't occurred to him that she would be coming back on that flight. She hadn't said anything about her mission to Fort Lookout, but he just took it for granted she would be there for a while. A week or a month. Obviously it had just been a routine call. An affair of the moment, a summons to a case.

Kingston watched. Sick.

He saw her standing with the two men. Then he saw Flannery climb out of the plane, scramble up to the wharf. Just as Flannery was straightening up one of the men stepped behind him, an arm rose and fell. Flannery crumpled up.

The red jacket darted swiftly. The other man grabbed her. She was very small in his grasp; he towered over her. Kingston knew the man was Wade. Flannery was lying sprawled on the wharf.

Kingston slipped into the bush. His teeth were clenched. His eyes hard and dead.

It wasn't enough to escape with your skin. There came a time when you had to throw in your hide for what it was worth, and if that wasn't enough you could do no more. The time had come.

IT WAS half an hour before he came down toward the clearing. Before he caught a glimpse of the cabin roof through the leaves. His objective was the spring in the shade of the bushes on the other side of the clearing. With luck, if the mine hadn't been discovered, he might find the battery. Maybe Matt Heath had had time to hook it up.

Kingston saw the back door of the little guest cabin. There was no gun in there, he knew, but there was a knife. A hunting knife impaled in a log at the head of the lower bunk. You had to get to close quarters to do anything with a knife, but he might get one of them if nothing else worked out.

One thing he knew. He wasn't going to hide in the bush and watch that plane go out. They would have to kill him before the plane went out.

The sudden roar of the motor broke the humming stillness. His heart jumped. The clamor died away. The pilot testing the motor. That meant they were getting ready to leave. He worked his way quickly down to the edge of the clearing.

A tenderfoot in dry bush will make a racket like a moose ploughing through slash, but an Indian or a good bushman can move through autumn woods like a shadow. Kingston caught a glimpse of young Engel, rifle in the crook of his arm, coming out of the back door of the big cabin.

Young Engel sat down in the sun, his back against the logs, the rifle across his knees. It was a sunny morning and the rat-faced little Nazi had been up all night.

Kingston watched him from the screen of leaves. He wondered if he could make it. With the knife. He moved silently toward the back of the guest cabin. The angle of the building hid Engel from view.

VII

DR. MIEHLE stood in front of the fireplace, his hands behind his back, his heels together. His thin lips were tight.

"I am in favor of complete liquidation," he snapped.

Wade sat on the cot, hunched forward. He rubbed his bearded chin.

"All of them?"

"Of course."

Wade cast a doubtful glance toward the doorway that led into the bedroom. Miehle caught the glance.

"He will die in any case. Who knows," said Miehle, curtly, "but what if a search plane comes in here within an hour after we're gone. If there is one living person in this camp"—his hand flashed up and hs snapped his fingers—"one living person, what happens then? The authorities will have a complete description of us."

Wade nodded.

"You're right."

"There must be no one left here alive. No one."

Wade glanced at the doorway again. He licked his lips. He gave Miehle a meaning look.

"The girl," he said with a little grin, "is very pretty."

Miehle shrugged.

"That," he said, "would interest you. To me it means nothing."

Outside the plane motor sputtered. Wade got up leisurely. On the floor, in a corner, Flannery stirred and groaned. His arms were tied tightly. After he regained his senses the first time, Flannery had been foolish enough to put up a fight. No one would have recognized Flannery's face now.

Wade said, "Schmidt brought his maps? He can take us out?"

"He guarantees it."

"I must say good-bye to our charming guest," grinned Wade, rubbing his beard.

SHE had washed and dressed the ugly wounds. One high in the chest, another in the side, across the ribs. Matt Heath had lost a good deal of blood, his breathing was shallow and he was feverish.

Good doctors might be able to save him, but Kay Glenn knew how little chance there was of getting Matt Heath to a good doctor. In the meantime she did what she could.

The whole business was so incredible that her brain was numbed. There had been that first quick shock of suspicion when she leaped lightly onto the wharf and found strangers there. But no time for recovery. Everything else had happened like lightning. She remembered how seriously she had taken Flannery's story about the Nazis and their plane. But now that she was face to face with the fact it seemed unbelievable.

Matt Heath was looking up at her from the cot. His voice dragged out in a hoarse whisper.

"Steve?"

She couldn't tell him Kingston was dead. Dr. Miehle had told her, politely regretful, how Kingston had been drowned. "Accidentally."

"All right," she whispered. "Steve's all right."

"Tell him—" Matt Heath shut his eyes. His lips moved wordlessly. In the next room she heard Miehle and Wade talking in German. She heard the cot springs creak in the other room as Wade got up.

"—didn't find the dynamite—" whispered Matt Heath. Then he muttered with a sudden surge of strength. "Blow them to hell-and-gone."

He stared at the ceiling, blinking in a puzzled sort of way, as if trying to remember. She heard a mannered cough. The big, burly man—Wade he called himself—was standing in the doorway. She didn't like his eyes. Possessive, confident eyes. They crawled over her body.

Wade beckoned with his head.

"You will come with me now," he said.

She heard Matt Heath whisper, "Good boy, Steve—partner—good man in the bush—like a son—"

His eyes rested on Wade. In the same dead whisper Matt Heath murmured thoughtfully:

"—look like us—talk like us—fool anybody—but don't think like us—not like us inside—not brothers—"

"Now, please," grunted Wade.

"—be decent to them," muttered Matt Heath, "and God help you—God help you—"

His voice trailed away.

The girl got up from the bedside. She faced Wade. She was trembling but she tried to fight that down. She held her chin up.

"What is it?"

"Matters are becoming a little difficult. Dr. Miehle wishes to leave no one here—"

She caught her breath.

"No one alive?"

Wade extended his big hands. "I am doing the best I can. I think—I think something can be done—come with me please. We must talk. It depends on you."

She walked toward the door. He stepped aside for her to pass, gestured to the kitchen and the back door of the cabin. Outside she saw young Engel crouched in the shade with the rifle. He cocked an appreciative eye at her, he had a comprehensive smirk for Wade. She turned and faced Wade.

"Well?"

Wade's fingers closed on her arm. Lightly, almost caressingly—but commandingly. He gestured to the guest cabin.

"I'm not going anywhere with you." She tried to keep her voice steady. "If you have anything to say, say it here."

Wade's burly head bent. He was frowning. His fingers tightened on her arm.

"You little fool!" he said in a low voice. "Don't you understand those men's lives depend on you? Their lives, I tell you. The other cabin. Quickly."

Confused, shaking, her heart pounding, she walked across the clearing. Wade snapped at young Engel:

"Help Schmidt check the plane."

Engel scrambled to his feet. He watched Wade follow the girl across the clearing. Engel pursed his lips in a grimace of complete understanding.

That Wade! Drop that big rascal into the middle of the Arctic and he'd be dodging around icebergs on the trail of something very special inside an hour! Engel trudged off around the side of the cabin, down to the beach.

THE knife was gone!

Dr. Miehle and his crew were thorough. They had evidently checked the place carefully for weapons. Kingston searched behind the lower bunk, looked on the floor. He straightened up and it was then, through the front window, he saw her coming across the clearing from the other cabin. And Wade behind her. He saw the butt of the automatic sticking from Wade's belt.

Kingston moved swiftly. He stepped on the lower bunk, swung his right arm over, pulled himself up. Never before had he realized the handicaps of the one-armed man. The exertion left him panting; sweat poured from his face; the useless left arm seemed bathed in fire, wrenched and torn by sharp steel claws. But he pulled himself into the upper bunk, above eye-level, lay flat, trying to control his gasping breath.

The door opened. Wade's heavy footsteps. The door closed. He heard Kay Glenn say, with unsteadiness in her voice: "I'd rather have the door left open."

"Yes?" said Wade coolly. Kingston couldn't see either of them. He was thinking about that automatic in Wade's belt. Just over the edge of the bunk he caught a glimpse of the top of Wade's bushy black head. It wasn't going to be easy—especially with that left arm out of action—he gritted his teeth with the knifing pain of it—

"The point is this," Wade was saying. "Dr. Miehle has been considering what to do. It's his opinion that it will be very dangerous to us if anyone is left here alive. But I think—" and Wade's voice became heavy, "I could persuade him that the risk is not so great. A girl as lovely as you could persuade me—"

There was a scuffle. The top of Wade's head moved suddenly nearer the edge of the bunk. Kingston heard no outcry from the girl. She was struggling silently, as desperately as she could—

"Of course," Wade was growling, "if you would rather see the pilot stood up against a wall and shot—and the old man with him—and yourself—"

Kingston edged nearer. Wade's head was turned away from the bunk. Kingston caught a quick glimpse of the girl's tense, white face as she fought in Wade's arms.

Wade's shaggy head and thick neck were just within reach. Kingston pitched forward, hooked his right arm savagely around Wade's throat.

Wade's first furious lunge dragged him from the bunk. Wade reached up, gurgling; his hands scrabbled at the arm tightening on his wind-pipe. Kingston locked his legs around Wade's middle and hung on, tightening the arm lock. Kay Glenn was flung halfway across the room.

Kingston knew he was bucking long odds the moment he swung his arm from the bunk. Wade had two arms to fight with —and a gun in his belt. And Kingston had no free arm to try for the gun. All he could do was hang on, rely on that terrible hold he had clamped on Wade's throat.

Wade whirled, crashed against the wall, slammed his burden hard against the logs. His groping fingers clawed, gripped in Kingston's hair. Kingston felt as if his scalp was being ripped off. He tensed his muscles, squeezed the arm tighter. Wade's mouth was open, his eyes bulged; he bowed his shoulders and wrenched sideways with a bull-like motion; Kingston was almost shaken loose; he tightened the hold again.

Now Wade thought of the gun. His right hand groped at his belt but in his blind, furious flounderings he crashed against a chair; he lost balance, went crashing to the floor.

Kingston came down hard. An agonizing fire consumed him; the pain from the wounded arm was like the thrust of a spear but instinct sent him scrambling to his knees, diving headlong at Wade. This time he aimed at the gun-arm, missed as Wade rolled over. They threshed furiously on the floor. Kingston saw Wade's arm flash free, the gun come up; he grabbed at it, forced back the barrel.

The stuttering crashes of the automatic roared noisily in the little cabin.

Wade uttered a gurgling cry. All his vast strength seemed unleashed in a great lunge of agony. Then his body collapsed and he sprawled with his wrist bent oddly under him, the gun jammed against his shattered side, his finger still hooked tightly on the trigger.

Kingston pulled himself up, left arm dragging. The wound had opened again. The improvised bandage was red with blood. Then the girl was crouching beside him, sobbing with thankfulness:

"The others—they'll be here—oh, quickly—"

Kingston reached out and pulled the automatic out of Wade's dead hand. His head was spinning, his brain numbed and confused.

"One bullet—if there's only one bullet—"

Kay Glenn snatched the automatic from him, pulled out the clip. It was empty.

"They heard those shots," she urged frantically, dragging him to his feet. "They will be here—quick, you've got to get out—"

Kingston sagged against the wall, panting. The empty gun was back in his hand. He shook his head drunkenly.

"—not going to run—any more—"

She flung open the back door of the cabin, pushed him through it, gasping, "Dynamite. Matt Heath said—they didn't find the dynamite."

Kingston stared at her. Away off, as if a long, long distance away, he heard Miehle shouting, an answering yelp from young Engel.

"Matt's alive?"

"They're going to shoot us." She beat at his chest with her fists, furiously. "Oh go! You've got to go—whatever Matt wants done about the dynamite—before they get here."

He tried to pull her through the doorway.

"With me—now—"

"Don't you see? You're the one who has to get away." She pulled herself back, thrust the door shut. Then she ran to the other door of the cabin and she was stand-

ing there just as young Engel hurled it open and crouched there, the rifle barrel nosing across the threshold.

"I killed Wade," the girl said quietly. She moved toward the door, stepped out past Engel. He uttered a horrified bleat when he saw the big dead body on the floor.

Dr. Miehle was running across the clearing. He had an automatic and he wasn't looking at her, nor at young Engel. He seemed to be watching something in the bush beyond the little cabin.

"Engel, you fool!" he screamed. "Don't let him get away. The other one. Ah, I see—"

Running, he flung up his arm and fired. There was a crashing in the bushes. Engel, after one startled glance, tore around the side of the cabin and plunged in headlong pursuit.

VIII

DR. MIEHLE stood looking down at Wade's body.

Wade was an unwholesome, inert mass of flesh; in death, with his mouth open, he looked even a little ridiculous. But he was a Nazi and dead and of seven men who had set out on that risky journey he was the fourth to go.

Dr. Miehle's cold, thin face was expressionless.

More than once he had warned Wade that when he died there would be a woman somewhere behind the gun. But he hadn't expected it would happen here in the heart of the bush.

"You killed him, you say?" said Dr. Miehle.

Kay Glenn said, "I killed him."

"A lie," returned Dr. Miehle.

"I killed him."

"With what?"

"His own gun."

"Where is it?"

Kay caught her breath. That was a mistake. She remembered the empty gun in Kingston's hand. Dr. Miehle smiled thinly.

"Our friend Kingston," he said, "has apparently risen from the dead." He swung around. His eyes were like chips of ice. "You know what happens in an enemy country when a German soldier is murdered? Tens, scores, hundreds die!"

Up in the bush Engel and Schmidt were threshing around in search of Kingston.

They were making a great racket about it. Miehle had been just a little late with the automatic. He had seen a naked back plunging from sunlight into leafy shadow but he had fired at a phantom.

Miehle pushed the girl roughly across the threshold, followed her out. The plane was ready, and he had seen quite enough of Blizzard Bay. The news that the other sabotage crew had been taken and that a search was on for his own squad had made him uneasy.

The sooner they got away from here the better. They could fly over to the lake where their own ship had crashed, salvage some of the special equipment, and then head south. There, once in touch with railways and highways, they had to find a quiet village where a man would be waiting. There he would make his contacts, set the sabotage campaign in motion.

But first of all Wade's death must be avenged. That was a matter of honor. For a funeral he visualized a pyre. Wade's body would be consumed by flame. The cabins of Blizzard Bay would be razed to the ground. In his own small way Dr. Miehle would leave the Nazi stamp on enemy territory.

Schmidt was calling from the bush. The search, he said, was hopeless, a waste of time. Miehle told them to come out. After a few moments Engel came floundering down the trail, sweating.

"In the cursed forest, it's almost impossible—a man can't see two metres ahead of him—"

"If you'd had your wits about you he wouldn't have escaped," Miehle rapped out. He cursed the wretched Engel crisply. Schmidt emerged from the bush, looking sullen. This wasn't his job, he growled. His job was to fly a plane.

"The fellow is like a ghost," he grumbled. "What's the difference? We leave him here, destroy the canoe and the food. He will starve."

"Wade is dead," said Dr. Miehle.

Schmidt's doughy face was impassive. Death was all in the day to Schmidt.

"And for *that*," Miehle continued, "this place will be wiped out. The prisoners will be shot."

SCHMIDT glanced at Kay Glenn. The sun gleamed in her fine blonde hair. Schmidt raised his eyebrows.

"And the wounded man?"

Miehle's smile was acid.

"His sufferings will soon be over. The execution will take place on the beach. Machine-gun. Immediately."

Schmidt and Engel closed in, one on each side of the girl. They walked down to the cabin. The girl did not resist. Her eyes were stony.

Flannery cursed them noisily when they hauled him to his feet and bundled him out of the cabin. Flannery was tough and hard-bitten; he had courage and he had played tag with death many times; but most bitterly he resented dying in this manner.

"Just like in Poland, eh, Herr Schnickelfritz?" he snarled at Dr. Miehle. "Brave boys!" Flannery's invective was violent. When he came outside and saw Kay Glenn he wheeled on them.

"Good God!" he yelled. "You're not going to kill her, too?"

Engel hit him across the mouth and pushed him against the wall of the cabin. Kay Glenn walked over and stood beside him.

"You murderers!" screamed Flannery. "You damned, yellow—"

Engel hit him again. Kay said:

"It's no use, Joe. Don't give them the satisfaction."

"Kay," blurted the pilot miserably, "I'm sorry. I walked right into this—for me it doesn't matter, for you—"

"Don't talk, Joe."

"The other—" said Miehle.

Schmidt and Engel went into the cabin. They came out with Matt Heath. He was very weak but he could walk; he pushed them away when they tried to help him.

"So this is what they do," he muttered, swaying a little. He braced himself with one hand against the logs of the cabin. His eyes rested on Flannery and the girl. Then he looked at Dr. Miehle. "Nazi!" he said, thoughtfully, as if identifying some strange species of animal. "Look like us—talk like us—not like us inside—"

"Get the machine-gun," snapped Dr. Miehle.

Engel scuttled back into the cabin.

Matt Heath straightened his shoulders, clapped a hand to his bandaged chest, shut his eyes with pain.

"At least," he said to Miehle, his voice strained with effort, "I may choose my own place. Not here—" He gestured toward the wharf. "Down there—so I may face the cabin."

Dr. Miehle shrugged.

"Very well." It was a harmless request. He told Schmidt to take the prisoners down to the wharf, to the water's edge. Engel came out with the machine-gun. It was a light weapon, a tommy-gun. Engel snapped a clip sharply into place. Engel's eyes gleamed with eagerness.

"Go on!" shouted Flannery. "Get it over with!"

Dr. Miehle walked stiffly out to the middle of the beach.

"A soldier of the Reich has been murdered!" he said metallically. "He did not die in battle. He was not in uniform. He was murdered. Three lives are little enough to pay for that crime."

"Never mind the speeches," Flannery said. "Start shooting."

"But," continued Miehle, "it is more important that the murderer pay." He wheeled, cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted:

"Kingston!"

In the calm morning his shout rang out clearly, echoed back from the trees and from the water. A pause while the echoes died.

"I am giving you one chance to surrender!"

The bay and the rocks took it up, called back mockingly:

"—surrender—surrender——"

If Kingston were within a mile of the place he would hear it.

"Or your friends will die!" shouted Dr. Miehle.

The echoes repeated it.

"—friends will die—" sang back the flat waters of the bay.

And the rocks called faintly:

"—die—die——"

IX

CRAWLING painfully through the bushes, his brain foggy with pain and exhaustion, clenching his teeth against the searing agony of the wounded arm, Kingston had almost reached the spring. It was deep in the shade of the bush on the west side of the clearing. The whole thing seemed hopeless. The dynamite hadn't been found, but he had to locate the wires, find the battery, and even then the mine was useless unless the Nazis came within range. But it was the ace in the hole, the only card left to play.

Then he heard Dr. Miehle's shout. His own name. And that harsh message flung to the sky.

Kingston was incredulous. It was a trick, surely. He wormed down the slope, down past the spring box with its tin dipper, he raised his head and peered through the tangle of green branches.

He saw the wings of the plane, the planks of the wharf, the blue water. And then at the approach to the wharf he saw the three figures.

Kay Glenn, slim and golden-haired, her chin high, gazing straight ahead. Matt Heath, like a battered old prophet, swaying a little on unsteady legs. Joe Flannery, his face black with dried blood, arms tied behind him, head lowered truculently.

And Dr. Miehle walking toward the cabin, where young Engel stood gripping the wicked little machine-gun.

Dr. Miehle cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted again. He repeated the message and it went rolling out over the bay and echoing back again from the smooth water.

"I give you three minutes, Kingston, to surrender!"

Then Dr. Miehle glanced at his wristwatch and stood with folded arms in the sun.

Miehle was bluffing. But it struck Kingston with sickening conviction that Dr. Miehle wasn't the bluffing kind. That machine-gun meant business.

"Wherever you are, Steve, stay there," bawled Flannery fiercely. "He'll cross you up. We're all done for!"

"Silence!" barked Miehle in a savage voice. He looked down at the wristwatch. Schmidt leaned against the side of the cabin and lit a cigarette.

Kingston groped frantically in the weeds and bushes near the spring. He had flung the battery into the undergrowth at the first blast of gunfire in the night. He had to search silently. The slightest rustle in the bushes would bring them on him. Young Engel was standing a few feet away from the black rocks of the fire-

site; Miehle and Schmidt a couple of yards to one side. But close enough—if he could only find the battery. Then the wires.

"Two minutes!" shouted Miehle.

The echoes flung it back: "—two minutes—minutes—"

Then Kingston saw the brown, oblong object half buried in the tall grass. The battery! His hand was shaking as he clawed for it. There was a chance that Matt Heath had hooked it up. But there was no glint of copper wire. The terminals were empty.

Sweat poured down his face. He couldn't see Kay Glenn or Matt or Flannery from where he lay now but in his mind he could see them as he would see them all the rest of his life, standing there with raised heads, waiting.

He tried to figure where the wires ran beneath the sand. A little to the left. His trembling hand combed the grass and the weeds, searched among the small bushes.

Hopeless. Better give it up. Run the chance. Maybe Miehle will keep his word and let the others go.

If Miehle went through with this, if that machine-gun riddled those three by the water's edge, Kingston knew his own soul would be lost. He would never be able to face himself in a mirror again, never be able to raise his head among men.

Then he saw the thin thread of wire. Almost hidden in the leaves. His fingers closed on it. Awkwardly, he bent it, hooked it into one of the terminals, tightened the screw.

"Wherever you are, Kingston!" shouted Miehle again. "I mean what I say. You have one minute!" His voice was hard, with no hint of uncertainty, no wavering.

The other wire! It had to be close by. Kingston's hand brushed frantically through the deep grass.

Don't take this chance . . . you can't find that other wire . . . you can't risk their lives this way . . . stand up . . . shout . . . wave your arms . . . give yourself up . . . you're through . . . those fellows have been too smart for you from the beginning . . . if you lose this crazy gamble you'll be a murderer as sure as there's a sun in the sky . . . throw in your hand.

The wire—the other wire—he fancied he could hear the tiny ticking of Miehle's watch—couldn't be any time left now.

Then he found it. Right under his hand. He gritted his teeth to steady his nerves. The wire slipped out of his hand. He snatched it up again, bent it.

He looked up. Through the green screen he saw young Engel raising the machine-gun, his ratlike face fanatical and intense. He saw Dr. Miehle glance at his wrist-watch, raise his arm.

God help me if I'm wrong—maybe the hook-up is faulty—battery mightn't work—can't get this second terminal—too late now.

The wire slipped in his wet fingers, evaded him.

"Very well, Kingston!" shouted Miehle. "Their blood be upon your head!"

Kingston lunged, straightened up in the bushes, hugging the battery under his arm, desperately tightening the screw.

"Wait!" he yelled, with all the strength of his voice. "Wait!"

Anything to gain those extra few seconds. The screw tightened. He saw Miehle's head jerk around. Kingston was standing up in the bushes, in full view of them. He saw young Engel turn. Then the machine-gun swung with incredible swiftness, bearing directly down on him. Kingston's hand closed on the plunger. He thrust down on it hard. Just as Engel's finger was squeezing the trigger. He thrust down and lunged headlong. Fell flat on his face with the battery under him as the earth opened with violent and stunning force, in blinding blast with crashing uproar and a wild black smother of hurtling rocks.

In the outpost hospital at the railway

Matt Heath sat propped up among pillows. His bald head shone as if it had been polished. His beard was luxuriant against the white sheet.

"After all," a little nurse was saying anxiously, "you've been a very sick man."

"Rubbish!" Matt Heath snorted. "I asked for newspapers."

"We didn't think you should worry yourself. The war news and all—"

"What do you think I am?" bellowed Matt Heath furiously, and was arguing the matter with vigor when Steve Kingston and Kay Glenn and Flannery came in. Steve's arm was in a sling and he looked strange and uncomfortable in a store suit. Matt Heath glared at Kingston from under shaggy brows.

"No uniform, huh? I told you that they wouldn't take you. With that arm, what did you expect?"

"It's mending nicely," Kay smiled. "And they'll take him later on. The recruiting officer practically promised."

Flannery put a cigarette in Matt's mouth and lit it. Matt Heath coughed on the first puff and grabbed at his chest.

"Cursed stitches!" he groaned. "Nurse said I couldn't smoke. I'll show her."

"Engel did a lot of talking," Kingston said.

"Good thing we left one of them alive," Flannery grinned. "He talked plenty."

"About what?"

"His friends and what they were up to," Kay Glenn said. "They rounded up some more saboteurs. It's in all the newspapers this morning."

"I haven't seen them yet," roared Matt Heath. He flung back his head and bawled for the nurse. "Newspapers!" he roared. "Bring me those papers! I want to know what's going on in the world! What do you think I am, an ostrich?"

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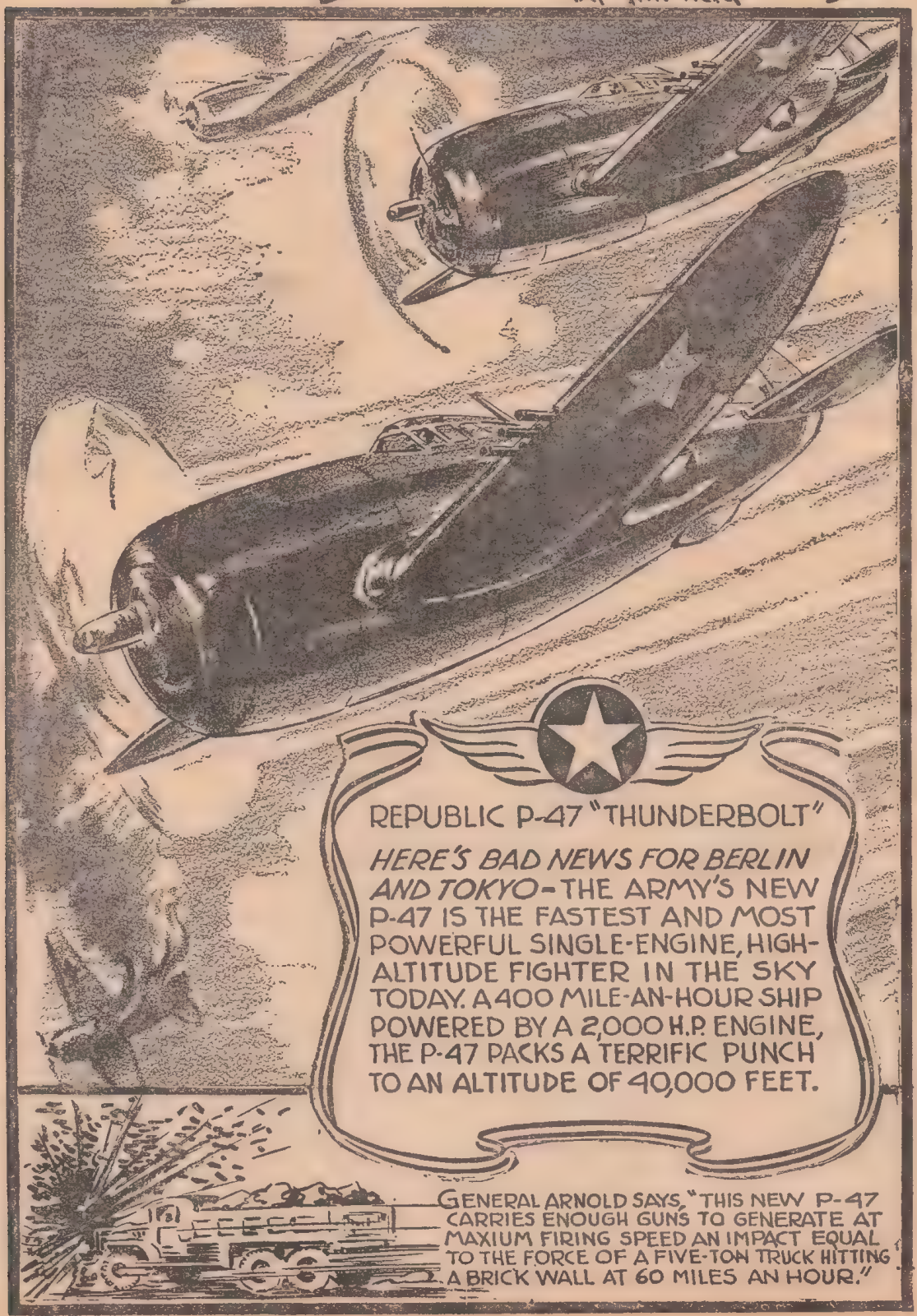
by Jim Hay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Sam Lee Was as American as a Pale Yellow Ten Dollar Gold Piece—and It Was Given to Him to See the Fall of Singapore

HONORABLE ANCESTOR

By GORDON MacCREAGH

Author of "A Man's Price," etc.

LIH SAM SUE was hideously trapped in Singapore. The more so because, of the half million-old Chinese who lived there, he was probably the only one who was not there voluntarily. He loathed the place. It and its people and all its ways. Even before the Jap hordes came.

His upbringing, his education, his whole philosophy of life rebelled against its conditions of swarming yellow and brown men who lived in their appalling Oriental squalor under the domination of the handful of lordly white men who lived in their aloof colonial magnificence.

He didn't even call himself by that absurd name, Lih Sam Sue. Plain Sam Lee, he gave his name on his passport. Born on a California truck farm, educated in Santa Clare High, and working his way through a post graduate in Frisco Medical. As American as a pale yellow ten dollar piece. He came to Singapore only because his grandfather had urgently written, designating him as his heir to a reputed half million or so of *haiqwan* taels, and Sam had lived hard enough to know the American slogan. Money talks. He told his principal, "I suppose I'd better go and collect; and then I could devote myself to this research work." And his principal had heartily agreed.

So here he was in Singapore — and learned his disillusion.

Old man Lih Sin lived in no mansion—Sam had envisioned something like the

fabulous palace of Boon Par, the "Tiger Balm" patent medicine king. He came, instead, to a dingy house jammed between thousands of other dingy houses on the South Side, overlooking the dingy, garbage infested river. That river jolted Sam into his proper place in Singapore. South of the bridge he was not Mister Lee of medical school; he was, "Hi yah, Chink," just one of a subject race, yellow, thin-eyed, slender, exactly like all the rest, to live where and how they pleased under white man freedom.

Sam swore an oath to himself in good American. "Lemme get my hands on as much as passage money and I'll get outa this stinking coolie trap before I revert to type."

It was on the river's North Side that was Singapore's magnificence. Its row of waterfront "godowns," storage sheds for the teeming business of the world's gateway between East and West—it seemed to Sam that that dirty river was the dividing line between East and West—and then the palaces of the unbelievably rich white man city. The pride of the Orient—and its prize; with its tall spire of the Episcopal Cathedral flaunting its Christian charity to brother man. Sam looked at it sourly sideways, though he had been raised Christian in America.

Grandfather Lih's house on the South Side was exactly like all the swarming rest. Outside plastered with pink paper charms against devils covered with huge letters in a weird brush script that Sam couldn't even read, inside full of musty, unventilated smells—and Grandfather Lih.

As old and as frail and as yellow as a carved ivory figure in a Chinatown curio shop back home—and as rigidly exact in the formalities of speech and manner for every occasion as prescribed by five thousand years of tradition.

In that musty old house all of Sam's American-bred exuberance was smothered by the crushing realization that what he had been in the West and what he was here in the East were separated by those thousands of years that had never changed, to which he was heir.

He helplessly hated all of it. Yet he could not, as the days went on with the rumble of invasion coming relentlessly nearer, help respecting the old man's unswerving faith in the rightness of the ancient rules of conduct, admiring his courage, his exquisite antique courtesy. Even when the old man disillusioned him about the inheritance that had lured him to this damned place.

GRANDFATHER LIH dressed up for the occasion, all in the rich embroidered robes of ceremonial. He said, "My son"— He never called Sam anything but son; his own son was lost to him, dead, even buried, in a foreign land without any of the proper rites, and it was an added sorrow that he had to speak to his grandson in English.

"My son, today the gods have favored me with eighty years. My time will not be long before I join the venerable ancestors. Let us then respectfully repair to the room of shrines, and I will tell you of your inheritance."

For a moment Sam's eyes lit up wide and expectant. Then they closed down thin again. He bowed to the old man and followed respectfully. Sam was learning.

The room of the shrines was a sort of holy-of-holies that Sam seldom entered and very little understood. But Grandfather Lih used to spend long hours in it, meditating and muttering. Its walls were mellow with olden golden brocades and dragon-blood red with lacquered cabinets before which the old man would place symbolic offerings of hand-lettered paper strips and grains of colored rice and things; and it always smelled of non-ventilation and mouldy spiced fabrics.

"Prepare now to listen, my son; and, *yeew t'eng ngoh kong.*" Grandfather Lih was always saying that to everybody, as his age in a Chinese community gave him the

right. Sam had learned that it meant, "Attend carefully to what I say."

Solemnly then the old man said, "The Rat people will capture Singapore." The appellation was one of the most contemptuous in Chinese thought.

Sam remained confident. "The white men in the town say that is impossible."

The old man bowed elaborately in deference to the weighed thought of others. But, " 'Desire is a cloud upon wisdom'," he quoted. "K'ung Fu-Tse has said it. 'Where much wealth is, comes complacence.' For sixty of my eighty years I have watched their confidence and their carelessness—as the Rat people have also watched; and from rats nothing is hidden. *Nay yeew t'eng.* They will take Singapore. They will take also the road by which that great people amongst whom you were born have furnished our people with the means to fight or the ancient principles of right. Therefore, my son—observe carefully, I command you. I have withdrawn all my wealth and have quietly exchanged it against weapons for the day of need."

"Ah!" said Sam.

"Yes, I have bought guns. A great store of guns and ammunition. That is why we live in this poor house. They, my son, are your inheritance. For the time will come when guns will be of priceless value to our country."

Sam's pulse pounded to the wily intrigue of the thing. But, "Ah!" he contrived to say as impersonally almost as the old man. He made obeisance—he was learning how to behave; even though he still wore American clothes. "I bow before your wisdom, my father." He said, "How high do you think the value should rise?"

The old man sat back with his two hands on his knees, his head high and his eyes the thinnest of slits, smiling like a very old and benevolent Buddha.

"In money, I do not know, my son. Our country will have but little money. But their value to those who fight will be priceless."

"Yes indeed!" Sam agreed. That was the kind of shrewd foresight that had enabled the old man to make his pile. And then the old man exploded it.

"They will be our gift, my son! Yours and mine, to our country. And thereby merit will accrue to you in value above gold, and much honor to my memory." The old man's smile became fixed, as in beatification.

"Oh!" Sam said. His voice was as cold as his skin. But he had inherited this much from the thousands of years, that his face remained as blank as the revered portrait of Sun Yat Sen on the wall. Even though he fully understood the inflexibility of the tradition that demanded a proper honor to the departed soul. The old man's son buried in a foreign land, his grandson a convert to a religion that recognized nothing of the need for ancestor worship, the honor must be vicarious through the prayers of strangers.

THE old man put his grief into words, his thin old voice like a chant: "And as many of the Rat People as these guns may kill, they will be slaves to our venerable ancestors."

Sam said nothing. He felt only the movement of his throat swallowing down half formed thoughts.

The old man beamed upon the loyal acquiescence implied in his silence. "The time of need has now come, my son. We shall therefore remove the munitions from their hiding and ship them quietly to those who fight for our people's freedom."

"Ah!" said Sam. "Hidden, eh?"

The old man chuckled. "So well that even the Rat People do not know the place; though their spies have paid me much attention. The place is known only to myself and to our lone servant, and now I will disclose it to you, my son, whose dutifulness an old man has learned to love."

Still chuckling, he led Sam to the window and pointed across the river. "Beneath the floor of the rice *godown* of my friend

Quong Fa who has now gone to his sacred ancestors. That one with the purple tiles and the many junks loading rice. See? And when the rice is all gone there will be nothing; for the floor has been cemented over."

"Oh!" said Sam. "Cemented over. Smart."

"And look, my son." The old man was as pleased as a boy at his own astuteness. "Within this shrine, the one reserved for my own memory, beneath this silken panel here is this electric switch. If the gods should forget us and all plans go wrong, this switch, my son, will utterly destroy all the store of weapons that all my wealth has bought. Thus may they not fall into the wrong hands and be a detriment to our country and a dishonor to the memory of our name. But the need for that precaution is past. We shall remove the wealth of weapons quickly before the Rat People come."

BUT old Lih Sin had lived in "impregnable" Singapore long enough to have absorbed a little of the white men's confidence. He, no more than anybody else, believed the unthinkable speed of the Japanese advance or the frightful precision with which the horde overran everything.

Sam lived through those mad ten days, bewildered with the confusion and astounded at his own safety. He saw the hopelessly outnumbered dog-fights above the city; saw the pride of empire dissolve under the bombs; saw the frenzy of last minute evacuation.

That was another reminder of just who he was in Singapore. For evacuation did not mean any ability to move the teeming swarms of "natives," it meant a mad rush to save a pitiful few of the civilian white population.

Sam watched the belated flurry and the bungling and the helpless bravery of all of it and marveled still at his own immunity —until he suddenly understood why. Understood that the Japanese, too, were exercising a fine discrimination. For they were carefully not bombing native Singapore!

Onto the purlieus of South Bridge Road they were, instead, raining pamphlets. They had no war against their Asiatic brothers, the pamphlets said; they were, rather, delivering them from their white overlords who had exploited their underpaid industry for so long; they were offering, in place of subjection, partnership in the great new commonwealth of Asiatic peoples. Let the yellow and the brown and the near-black brothers be tranquil. And—Sam noted it with a grim cynicism —the brothers were just that. Of their swarming thousands only a paltry few hundred ran screaming to the defense.

And then it was all over. A swift nightmare run to its end. Unconditional surrender. White man pride of the long centuries humbled as never yet in history. Sam saw it all. White men in their thousands suddenly herded, like coolies, and driven into pens by little yellow men. Haughty white women, hysterical under jostling, reviling their yellow herders, getting their faces slapped; their enraged men folk leaping to their help, getting coolly ruthlessly bayoneted.

And himself free to come and go, in spite of his white man clothes. His face, his passport. Only that there was a guard on Elgin Bridge and grinning little Japanese soldiers replaced the tall, stern Sikh policemen in the street corners.

That was all. Life in the native town went on.

Sam came home one day to find a visitor, a man in the uniform of a Japanese officer who looked curiously familiar. The man said familiarly, "Hiya, Lee" and then Sam recognized him as the obsequious apparently Chinese clerk in the Hongkong and Shanghai bank where Grandfather Lih kept a small account.

The officer jabbered at unintelligible length to Grandfather Lih. The old man sat like an idol, his eyes so thin that they

seemed almost closed. The officer seemed to be arguing, persuading, then threatening. Grandfather Lih replied in laconic monosyllables. Finally he said:

"My son. Escort our honorable guest to the door."

Outside of the door the officer turned furiously to Sam. He spoke a perfect A.B. Mission English. He said:

"Look, Sam Lee. You're modern. You can understand what we are doing for the East and you haven't any of the antiquated notions of that old fool. Maybe we can deal with you."

Sam's face went blank. "Deal?" he said.

"That's what. We know well enough he's been bringing in the stuff; we don't know exactly how much or where it's hidden. It could be—worth some money for us to know." He grinned at Sam confidentially. "And then you could go back to your medical research."

"Oh!" said Sam. "So you know about me?"

The officer shrugged impatience. "Of course we know. Rich old munition-importing Lih Sin's American relative. D'you think we've been sitting here as silly as these British all these years? We know your studies and your life ambition."

Sam's eyes became as thin as Grandfather Lih's. "How much—money?"

"Depending. Maybe ten thousand dollars; maybe much more; depending on how much munitions, what potential damage to our side, a lot of things."

"Aa-ah! Well, you must know too, that I am a newcomer in my grandfather's affairs."

THE officer looked at Sam sharply. "So? Bargaining, eh? As shrewd as the old man." Then the little teeth showed close bitten together. He seemed to be a man of strong temper long suppressed under a mask of humility, now arrogantly rampant. "Look here, you. We're being lenient here; but you can't fool with us. If you really don't know you can find out. Or you tell that stubborn old fool we've made strong men talk secrets before now."

Sam's eyes, too, were so thin that they seemed to be closed. The officer scowled at him. He said, "I don't get you—quite. Since you're not a fool, I think you must be bargaining. Very well, I will communicate with my superior Chief of Intelligence. You will report to me within three days. And remember—" the little teeth snarled out—"we're not fooling."

"Where?" Sam's voice was as thin as his eyes. "In case, just in case—your superiors may authorize you to make a business proposition that might interest—my grandfather?"

"The rear rooms, second floor, in Qwang Hsi's opium house. Three days, I'm giving you, my smart business-like student. No more; or something unpleasant may happen. We never take chances with a thing like this—or anything. That's how we're here."

The intelligence officer swaggered off, jaunty in his assured authority. Sam watched him go; he knew that the man would be as ruthless as the acme of efficiency always demands. Three days. A desperately short time in which to do anything.

Sam went back to his grandfather. The old man sat as carven still as an idol, his eyes closed, his hands palms upwards in his lap, thumbs pressed to mid-finger tip. Sam recognized the "attitude of meditation" of the big *ts'ut hay* Buddha in the Meeoo-kum temple. A slow, regretful wave of sympathy swept over him for the old man's unshakable faith in the ancient beliefs that were so out of place in the grim realities of today.

Grandfather Lih came as out of a trance. He said:

"My son, I have debated the matter of the electric switch and total destruction of the munitions."

Sam's breath held poised.

"But," the old man pronounced his de-

cision. "I have decided against it. Their value is too great."

Sam's eyes suddenly opened wide to study the placid old face, whether the business instincts of a lifetime might be proving stronger than sacrifice.

"Even now, my son, patriot young men of our people are secretly organizing the *p'ung yow t'ong yum,* the Friends of Chinese Freedom Society. The munitions will be of priceless value to them when the time is ripe to drive out the Rat people."

"They will never be driven out," said Sam. "I have been out and have seen their work. They are here and, being now the masters, one must recognize the fact and deal accordingly."

"They will be driven out," said the old man. "It will take time; but they will be driven. Let the gods give us a little time to organize, and we shall remove the weapons. K'ung Fu Tse has said, 'Patience is made of a gold that is stronger than iron'."

You couldn't argue with a faith like that. Sam went out and saw more of the victors' works. Saw the white men, those few technicians who were still necessary for the city's functioning, sullenly attend to their jobs under laughing yellow men's bayonets. Saw how quickly the yellow men learned to take over, how thoroughly they searched, like ants, every last building and cellar and sampan in the harbor and gleefully kicked the few remaining fugitives to the concentration pens. Saw how like swarming ants they were already busily at work rebuilding their captured prize with never a remotest thought that they would ever have to let go.

Very thoughtfully and not fully understanding why, Sam went to the Hindoo bazaar by the Sri Mariamman temple and bought a cheap Belgian pistol.

In the days of British domination it was strictly forbidden for a "native" to own any kind of a gun. Now they were suddenly appearing, rusty and with gummed works, at open counters. The Japanese sentries at the bazaar corners chattered and laughed carelessly at them; they themselves stood beside machine-guns. Sam wondered whether Grandfather Lih's astuteness had included machine-guns in his hidden hoard, and, if he had, what use they would be against fleets of fast tanks? They had not availed much in the hands of those white men who had so futilely bravely defended Malaya. Sam saw some of them too, working under heavy guard, the supreme Japanese gesture of superiority; for they worked at coolie labor, clearing litter. The devastating fact was patent that these white men were not as good as coolies at that sort of work; but few of the yellow and brown and near-black "natives" would have the intelligence to reflect that this might possibly be because of the efficiently simple formula of "no work, no eat."

Yes, Sam was convinced, the conquerors certainly entertained no fear that there would ever be any white man retribution.

Three days. Sam went to the opium house. Business was as usual; only that the lavishly luxurious upper floor with its exquisitely decorated cubicles had been taken over by officers as victors who boasted their appreciation of art.

Burly, wrestler-built men with coldly callous faces lounged about the entrances in expectant do-nothing. Sam knew them to be *ronins,* the strong arm squad of the Nipponese gestapo; their motto was that they could, and would, do anything and they knew how to make anybody else do it too.

The intelligence officer was in a room

tastefully done in pale lavender, cunningly designed to promote dreamy relaxation. His clever face showed neither. Things apparently had not been going well this morning and his temper was close to the surface. He said:

"Ha! I knew you would see sense. My chief raises his offer five thousand. Now talk."

Sam's lips smiled. He said, "I need more time to persuade my grandfather."

The officer's little even teeth snarled out, his words clipped hard between them. "You fool. You can't haggle with us. There's our limit and with that money you can go back to where they don't treat you as coolie class and live up to your fat American scale of living—" and then he laughed, "as long as that lasts."

"My grandfather," said Sam, "is a secretive man. I must have more time."

The officer scowled at him speculatively. "If I thought you knew, my brash bargainer, I'd turn you over to the squad and see how long you'd hold out for time. Time, you damned fool! Why d'you think we offer money? Only because it's the efficient way to save time; the time it would take to make that old fanatic talk without killing him."

"You would never," said Sam, and there was a curious pride in his voice, "make my grandfather talk. He is a patriot of the old school."

The officer scowled moodily on. "It's the only reason why we've offered to do business with you."

"And nobody else knows," said Sam softly. "You know how secretively he has lived, with no friends, no confidantes, only one faithful old servant."

"Only one—*Oya-undoshi!*" The officer clapped his hand to his forehead, pushed his chair scraping behind him and started to his feet. "Dammit if I haven't been as much a fool as you! The servant, of course. Only for this silliness of dealing with his heir." He called. Almost before his voice ceased to vibrate from the laquered panels three of the *ronins* were at the door. He chattered at them. With leisurely confidence they ranged themselves alongside of Sam. The officer grinned at him.

"When you have been here many more years, my bright student lad, as you now will be, you will know that nothing is hidden from a Chinese servant." He added the sting to his derision. "And to a Chinaman a hundred dollars is a lifetime fortune." And he rubbed it callously in. "And if it isn't to this faithful hound, he isn't so old that he can't be questioned without dropping dead.

He hurried from the room. Sam could hear the clatter of several pairs of feet running down the stairs. The *ronins* looked at him heavy faced, dispassionately, with about as much expression as dogs not yet sicked on to any interesting hunt.

Sam moved to the silk embroidered *yeen-shik* couch and let his limbs tremble down onto it. There was no careful control of his thoughts. It didn't matter anyhow. The *ronins* were not interested in his thoughts any more than were gorillas. Sam didn't know himself what his thoughts were; they were a racing confusion of pictures of the dingy old house, of the inflexibly dignified old man, of the silently shuffling old servant; wondering whether the latter knew, and if he did, how much he would—could be made to—tell.

SAM had the oriental faculty of shutting the outside out of his mind, holding it a blank that conserved thought and energy for such time as they would be needed. He sat on the sickly-scented couch, his eyes closed to the light, his breath in half suspension, a stiff oriental image, incongruous in his American clothes. For an hour; two hours; he didn't know; it didn't matter.

Clatter on the steps restored animation. The officer stepped briskly through the door. He was grinning like a yellow

moon. He chattered to the three guards. They grinned, went out. The officer stood spraddle legged, enjoying Sam there on the couch. He said, "You have been a nice smart fool. Now you get nothing—unless perhaps I tell the boys to beat you up a bit just as a lesson nobody can fool with us. Only," he debated the matter, "the afternoon's work has left me in a good mood."

Sam said only, "My grandfather?"

The officer shrugged. "Oh! The old fool was—difficult. But the servant knew, of course, and he talked. Though it took the boys two hours."

Sam was standing up now. His reanimation was tingling away from his extremities, leaving his whole being cold. In a chilled voice he said again, "And my grandfather?"

The officer shrugged again, hissed deprecatingly through the even little teeth. Quite impersonally he said, "It is a great mistake, as you and a lot of other people will learn, to interfere with our people's destiny of expansion."

THE embroidered couch was near the door, the door fitted with an inside bolt. Sam pushed the bolt as he passed it with his elbow. The officer still grinned at him, contemptuously confident in the flush of his triumph. Sam's voice, tonelessly frozen, told him.

"You are perhaps the first of your people in Singapore to learn what a great mistake you are making about your destiny."

He stepped round the pearl inlaid sandalwood table toward the officer. The officer's eyes opened in incredulity. His lips drew away in the authoritative snarl. Sam very deliberately told him:

"I am not a practised shot; so—" He pressed his cheap pistol close to the officer's body and kept pulling the trigger till no more bullets came. Stare and snarl both opened wider on the officer's face as he hugged his hands to his stomach and bent lower and lower. It looked as though he were bowing before Sam.

Knuckles were knocking on the door. Voices calling—asking—their tone inquiring rather than alarmed.

Tonelessly Sam commented, "Damned gorillas think it's the other way round." Then he climbed out of the window onto the yellow porcelain tiles of an overhang, scuttled along to its end, dropped into an alley, ankle deep in the opium palace's garbage.

He ran all the way home. The door was neatly closed. People went their way along the street. Life went on as usual.

Within the house everything was neatly in order. Only the hot smell of the kitchen charcoal brazier more than usually pervaded the usual mustiness. The old servant was gone. Grandfather Lih was neatly laid out on the couch in his room of shrines. Only a little blood made a bright smudge on the front of his black silk jacket. His old ivory face was set in his inflexible conviction of having done right.

Sam slowly knelt by the couch. Slowly his head bent till it rested on the thick-slippered feet. His iciness of the past hours slowly melted from him, slowly overflowed from his eyes. He knew that he had loved the old man. In spite of all his quaint antique notions, his queer insistence upon filial respect—perhaps because of them—there had been a calm certitude of the right principles about Grandfather Lih that made everybody love him.

Sam knelt crouched at the old man's feet till a far clamor from across the river filtered through the window. He knew subconsciously that that was what he had been waiting for. He stood up and looked across to the rice *godown* with the purple tiles.

A bustle of activity was growing around it. Little yellow men in steel helmets stacked rifles and swarmed into it with picks and shovels. Some dead bodies were thrown out of it as callously as sacks of dirt. Other men with fixed bayonets

formed a close cordon. Officers went in, obsequiously making way for a much be-medalled superior.

Sam wondered whether that might be the victorious general himself; wondered just how important the unfortunate old servant had confessed this munition hoard to be. He went to the red lacquer shrine, the one reserved for Grandfather Lih's memory. He could still see the swarming activity around the warehouse. He stood a long time. Then slowly he reached his hand to the silken panel and pressed down the electric switch.

"Slaves, my grandfather," Sam Lee said. "To the venerable ancestors."

It took just that time for the sound of the roar to reach him. A thunderous roar of explosive and falling masonry; and the glass of the little window fell in with a tinkling crash. And then came the rising roar of screaming, cursing men. Just as he had seen it when the bombs had fallen. Only more so.

Sam stood and watched. Then he went and washed his hands in the old rose china basin on the antique washstand. Washed carefully and with finality. Then he walked out of the musty smelling house and locked the rickety old door behind him. He said to himself reflectively, "The Sz koh T'ong will bury him with the proper ceremonies for a soul well attended. I'd be of no use there." He dry-washed his hands. "So now to join up with that *p'ung yow* Friends of Freedom Society."

In the next issue

NINE MINUTES SCREEN TIME

They were many more minutes in the hell of Burma.

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A novelette of thrills by

E. HOFFMANN PRICE

+ + **SHORT STORIES for December 25th** + +

NEW RIVERS CALLING

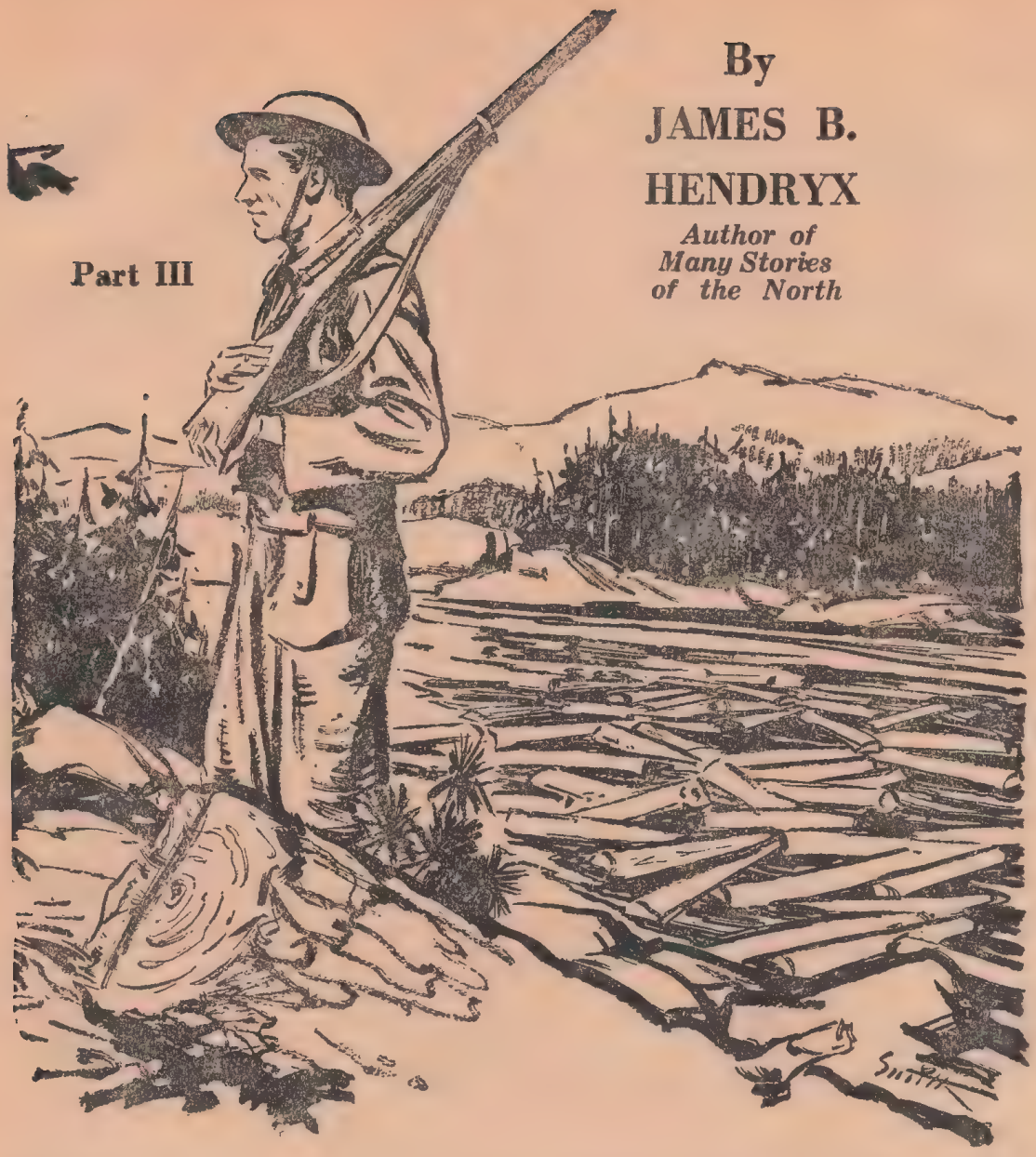
SOMETHING ABOUT THE STORY AND WHAT HAS HAPPENED BEFORE

THE story opened in the Blind River Country; that great tract of timber land in Ontario north of Lake Huron. Stan Klaska, who has been driving a truck for the lumber company, rattles into the little town of Blind River late. For this he can blame Joe Bedore—the Frenchman had a loaded truck ahead of him on the narrow road and blandly ignored Stan's wish to pass.

Stan didn't want to be late, for there was to be a dance in town and he had a date with Rose Brady. He was afraid Rose might get tired waiting and go to the dance with Jack McVane, brother of Jimmy McVane of the Provincial Police. Rose waited for him, but they quarreled over Stan's decision to give up his job with the lumber company and go to guid-

By
JAMES B.
HENDRYX
Author of Many Stories of the North

Part III



A War That's Coming, and One That's Here Are Two Very Different Things

ing for the summer. Rose thinks this is not ambitious, but Stan says if the bush and rivers call you, you can't stick to a job in any mill.

Rose insinuates that Jack McVane will be around for the summer, and after some heated words Stan leaves her. He has a few drinks, meets up with Joe Bedore and there is one terrific fight. In the morning Stan can't remember much of it, but takes his truck out for his last day's work. Then he learns that Joe Bedore is dead—knifed—and that several men swear he is Joe's murderer. Stan comes to the conclusion that he cannot prove his innocence and takes to the bush. Jimmy McVane of the police goes after him, and has an accident in which he breaks his leg. Stan finds he cannot leave him, so manages to get the policeman to safety. Then he outfits at one isolated post after another—hearing strange talk of another world war—and

winters in the bush. Here he meets Helene and Pierre Bovee, half French, half Indian, and learns how a girl also can love the bush country and recognize the call of new rivers.

But war comes, and Pierre and Stan both know they must join up, Stan feeling the police will have other matters beside him on their minds. He tells Helene how he dreads leaving her alone in the bush, but she says, "I never feel alone in the North. We are safe, here. War will not come to the bush country."

CHAPTER XVI

HEARST

SISTER MARIE prepared supper that evening without the assistance of Helene. The meal was eaten in silence, the old woman with her inscrutable black eyes fixed upon the blank wall of the cabin, the two men with eyes downcast upon their plates, as the children's beady eyes darted swift furtive glances into the faces of their elders.

As Sister Marie washed the dishes the two men stepped outside, seated themselves upon the split log bench, and rolled cigarettes.

Reaching into his pocket, Pierre withdrew a roll of bills. "Your fur brought thirteen hundred and sixty-two dollars," he said. "We brought back the supplies you ordered—a hundred and forty dollars' worth.

They are under the tarp at the landing. Your winter supplies came to two hundred and six dollars. The balance is here, ten hundred and sixteen dollars."

Stan took the money and thrust it into his pocket without counting it. "The supplies can stay here—for Helene, and Sister Marie, and the kids. The stuff in my cabin, too. I'm going with you."

"I owe you a hundred and forty more, then."

"You don't owe me a damned cent. My God—what you people have done for me—what you've taught me—and I don't mean just the tricks of the bush either—why, I can never repay you!"

"You forget that the obligation is the other way around," Pierre said. "Had it not been for you, Helene, and Sister Marie, and the babies would not be alive."

"Forget it," Stan growled gruffly. "When do you start?"

"At daylight."

"I'll make up my pack and be ready. We'll take my canoe. Yours is better—we'll leave it for Helene."

Pierre shot him a glance. "You going to enlist?"

"Sure I'm going to enlist. By God, this is as much my war as it is yours! Why shouldn't I enlist?"

"How about the police?"

"To hell with the police! They won't know me. No one down there ever saw me with a beard. I'll leave it on till I get to the Soo. I'm not very well known there. I'll join up under some other name."

"I'm going to enlist in Toronto," Pierre said. "We'll go up the Kabinakagami to where it crosses the railway, about fifteen miles west of Hearst, then walk into Hearst and catch the train."

"I'd go on to Toronto with you, but I've got to stop and see a fellow at Nemegos. Like to stop off at Blind River and Thessalon, too. No one will know me—and it might be a hell of a while before I'll see 'em again."

Pierre nodded somberly. "Yes, it might be a hell of a while. This is going to be a long war."

"And we've got to win it," Stan said gravely. "By God, we've got to keep the Germans from coming over here!" Twilight deepened into dusk, and dusk into darkness. "Where is Helene?" he asked abruptly.

Pierre shrugged. "She was here when I went to your cabin and found you chop-

ping wood. When I returned she was not here."

"I saw her for a few minutes—on the big rock. I told her I was going overseas —to keep the damned Germans out of the bush country. She said she knew that I would go. Said she would stay here and look after sister Marie and the kids. I told her she was a brave girl, and she said she would be safe here—that the war would not come to the bush country. Then she left abruptly. She seemed mighty upset about something—your going away, I suppose."

Pierre's sultry dark eyes raised to the bearded face. "Maybe," he said dryly. Then, after a short pause, "The war has already come to the bush country. Even the babies know that something is wrong. They are too little to know that the whole damned world is wrong. But Helene knows —knows that never again will her world be the same."

At daybreak the following morning Stan joined Pierre at the landing. "Where's Helene?" he asked, as he swung his pack into the canoe.

"I do not know. She did not return to the cabin last night."

"But—good God, Pierre! Where is she? We've got to find her. Maybe something's happened—some accident. Maybe she's lying in the bush, somewhere—hurt."

The halfbreed shook his head. "No. Helene can take care of herself in the bush. She will return after we have gone. She is a sensitive girl. She is afraid to return before—afraid that she would betray feelings that she would rather hide—afraid to say good-by."

Stan stood silent, his eyes on the dim outline of the cabin—hoping—half expecting to see the door open and the girl come toward him across the dim-lit clearing with her plaid skirt, and her blue cape, and the bright red feather in her hair—as she had come that other dawn, only three short weeks before.

"Damn this war!" he said aloud, and turning away, stepped into the canoe and took his seat in the bow, as Pierre shoved off.

AT THE railway Stan laid both paddles in the canoe and shoved it out into the stream. "Some poor devil of an Indian will find himself a good canoe," he said as they watched it disappear around a bend. "Come on—let's go."

It was the eleventh of July, and hot. The two pack-laden men walked the ties, their eyes focused far ahead where the two gleaming rails writhed like snakes in the shimmering heat waves that rose from the gravel ballast. A passenger train roared toward them and they stepped aside to let it pass in a whirlwind of choking dust and coal smoke. Near Ryland a section crew overtook them and gave them a ride into Hearst on the hand car.

They went to the station to find that Pierre's train was due in half an hour. There was no train on the A. C. till the following day. Stan bought his ticket to Nemegos, and the two went out and walked up and down the platform. People came, singly and in small groups—some carrying luggage. One or two walked the platform, but most of them stood in the shade of the depot talking and laughing. A young man in a green suit, a bright red tie, and yellow shoes seemed to be the center of attraction for half a dozen girls, as an older woman and a man stood by smiling.

An officer in the uniform of the Provincial police strolled past and Stan breathed easier as the man met his eye with no hint of recognition. A man in faded blue overalls trundled a truck upon which were three or four trunks to the far end of the platform and left it. As he returned he grinned at the boy in the green suit.

"Give 'em hell when you git over there, Ronnie. Fetch Hitler's ears back with you —an' we'll nail 'em up in the baggage room." Which sally of wit brought forth

giggles from the girls, and a self-conscious grin from the sweltering swain.

A black smudge appeared far down the track to the westward. People craned their necks and suddenly began to talk faster. A long whistle blast sounded.

"It's hot," Stan said, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Yes," Pierre agreed, "it's hot."

The train pulled in and ground to a stop. With squealing giggles each of the girls kissed the boy whose face flamed redder even than his tie. Then the older woman kissed him, and Stan saw that tears were streaming down her withered cheeks. The man shook his hand in a mighty grip. " 'Bye, son," he said gruffly.

" 'Bye, Paw." The boy turned to the woman. "Don't take it hard, Maw. The war ain't goin' to last long. I'll be back before you know it." Then he picked up his telescope grip and climbed aboard the train.

STAN stood aside as Pierre, his packsack dangling from his shoulder by the tumpstrap, raised his foot to the step. He said, "So long, Pierre."

Pierre turned his head. "So long, Stan. Good luck. See you in Berlin." Then he disappeared through the doorway of the coach. The conductor waved a signal, and with slow measured puffs from the engine the train moved away from the station.

When it was but a black smudge in the distance, Stan picked up his packsack. The platform was deserted. Off to one side, the older man untied the hitch strap, climbed into the old-fashioned buggy, and gathered up the reins. "Giddap," he said, slapping the reins on the rump of the sway-backed bay, and they moved off down the road, the woman staring straight ahead.

Stan accosted the man in the faded overalls who was busy at the standing desk in the baggage room. "How's the chances to leave my pack here overnight? I'm pulling out on the A. C. in the morning?"

"Okay—set it over there in the corner. It'll be all right."

Sauntering down the street, Stan stepped into a tavern and called for a bottle of beer. As the waiter brought it he glanced into a mirror. "Good God," he muttered, "do I look like that?" He drank the beer, and stepped across the street to a barber shop.

"Hair-cut," he said. "Leave the beard on."

"Trim it up a little, eh? Kinda round it off along the edges."

"Okay."

"Stranger in town?" the barber said, as he pinned an apron tightly about Stan's neck.

"Yup."

"Be'n back in the bush, eh?"

"Yup."

"Cuttin' pulpwood?"

"No."

"Trapper?"

"Yup."

"War's ketched most of the young fellas."

"Yup."

"Fellas like you an' me, we're lucky. Like I says to the old woman last night—'One war's enough,' I says, 'by God they don't git me in this un'. Ain't that the way you look at it?"

"Yup."

"Yer damn whistlin'. What I claim, if them damn fools over there want to kill one another off—let 'em go to it. 'Long as the ocean holds out they ain't a-comin' over here—ain't that so?"

"Yup."

"But I'll bet they'll tax hell out of us, at that. Ain't that right?"

"Yup."

When finally the apron was unpinned Stan stepped from the chair and tendered a bill. "Keep the change," he said. "You'll need it to pay taxes."

"Thanks. Come in again. Allus like to talk to strangers—sort of gives a man a different slant on things."

A few minutes later, as Stan was about

to enter a restaurant, he glanced toward a man who was coming down the street. Then he grinned. "Here's where my beard gets its first try-out," he muttered. He sauntered on, meeting the other face to face. The man glanced at him and passed on. Turning, Stan caught up and fell in beside him. "Don't give me away here on the street—but don't you know me?" he said.

The man glanced at him. "Can't say as I do? Pulpwood cutter?"

Stan grinned. "Stan Klaska," he said. "You outfitted me at Mattice, a year ago."

"Well—I'll be damned! Shore I know you. What you doin' here?"

"Right now I was just about to step into the restaurant for a bite to eat."

"To hell with eatin' in the restaurant," Joe Taylor said. "Come on home with me. The wife'll have supper ready 'an she'll be glad to see you. We often wondered how you made out."

"Home?" Stan asked. "You mean you are living here in Hearst, now?"

"Yeah. Rented Bill Creech's house. Bill, he's in the army an' his woman got a job down to Sudbury."

"But how about the store at Mattice?"

"Sold out a month ago. Jest hangin' around to clean up some odds an' ends. Got a pulpwood contract I'm tryin' to git shet of—but no one wants it on account of everyone's in the army except old men an' Indians—an' they ain't worth a damn. Fella name of Casey from Michigan in town promised to go down an' look the stuff over, if he ever gits around to it. Goin' to enlist as quick as I git things straightened out."

"Enlist! I thought you told me you'd been in one war, and that was enough—that they'd never get you in another one."

"That was last year," Taylor said. "A hell of a lot of water's gone over the dam sence then." They had left the main street and Taylor opened a wooden gate and led the way along a short walk flanked by hollyhocks and delphinium to the door of a small house on the outskirts of the village.

Mrs. Taylor beamed, as her husband mentioned Stan's name. "Law sakes, I never woulda know'd you, Mr. Klaska! Whiskers makes a sight of difference in a man." She bustled about setting a third place at the table, while her husband twirled the dial of a radio.

"S'posed to git a news broadcast 'long about now," he said. "We're fightin' the Germans somewheres up there in Norway."

"Supper's on," Mrs. Taylor announced. "The news ain't fer five minutes, yet. Set it on seventy-four, that's C. B. L. Toronto, an' turn it down, an' come on an' eat 'fore the vittles gets cold. Land sakes, anyone'd think Joe was runnin' the war, the way he hangs over that radio!"

"Well, a man likes to keep posted about what's goin' on."

"Listen to him!" laughed the woman. "An' here a year ago, come next month, he was down to Nemegos an' he give Slim the dickens fer readin' up on the news—claimed he was jest wastin' his time. Slim told him war was comin'. But Joe wouldn't believe him. An' inside a month, it come!"

"A war that's comin', an' one that's here is two different things," Taylor said, heaping his plate with potatoes.

Stan grinned. "Maybe if more people had seen it coming, they'd have spent more time getting ready for it," he said. "I was like you. No one wants a war, so we kidded ourselves into thinking that there wouldn't be any war—that the Germans weren't in shape to start another war—and that if they did, it was none of our business. But—the way he's gone through Europe, we damn well know now that it is our business—just like Slim said. By the way—how is Slim?"

"He's overseas. Enlisted the day that Britain declared war."

"Did he sell out, too?"

"No. Ella's runnin' the store. Fine woman—Ella. They don't make 'em no better."

"I'm going to stop off at Nemegos and pay for the supplies I got last summer, and pay back the hundred dollars Slim slipped into my packsack," Stan said. "And that reminds me—I owe you eighty-six dollars. I'll pay you after supper — figured on leaving it with Slim."

"You can work it the other way around an' save a trip to Nemegos. I'll see that Ella gets the money," Taylor said. "How much you owin' Slim?"

Stan smiled. "I don't know. He wouldn't tell me. Just said it would be plenty."

"You can call Ella up, long distance, and she'll look it up in the book. You sure you can spare the money?"

"Yes, I did pretty well trapping, and I won't need much money where I'm going." He gave a brief summary of his sojourn in the bush. "So now," he concluded, "I'm on my way to enlist. I want to stop off at Blind River and Thessalon —don't know when I'll ever see 'em again."

Taylor nodded. "But how about the police?"

Stan smiled. "I'll take a chance on the police. Neither you nor Mrs. Taylor recognized me. And I don't believe Jimmie McVane nor that fat Hare will, either."

Taylor laughed. "You don't need to worry about Hare. He got kicked out of the Provincials, after lettin' you git away, that time. Even his uncle couldn't keep him on after that. He tried to git in the Mounted—but they wouldn't have no part of him. He enlisted an' tried to git into some kind of an officer's school. They must be damn hard up for officers, if they'd take him. Last I heard they had him in with the Old Sweats guardin' the German prisoners down to Espanola. By the way, you got yer registration card?"

"Registration card?"

"Shore. Everyone of military age had to register. They give 'em a card an' you've got to carry it on you all the time. Any police officer can stop any stranger an' ask to see his card, an' if he ain't got one he's liable to arrest."

Stan's face clouded. "Gosh—that puts me in a hell of a fix. If I give 'em my right name they'd grab me up for that murder. I suppose I could give 'em some other name."

"No chance. You've got to give your residence, too—an' they'd check up with yer local board. It's lucky you got here when you did. I can fix you up so you'll get by, if a policeman should stop you. A pulpwood cutter died this spring in one of my camps, an' I'm holdin' his stuff till we can locate his folks, somewheres over in Quebec. He didn't have nothing to speak of, but I've got his card, an' I'm holdin' about forty dollars in pay he had comin'. When we hear from his folks I'll send on his stuff—it ain't only an old suitcase with some clothes in it—an' his pay, an' I won't say nothin' about the card. If they should ask about it—well, it's jest lost—that's all. You take the card. It's made out to Nels Larsen, Victoriaville, P. Q. Better not enlist under that name, though. The army might check up on you an' find out Larsen is dead. But the card'll get you by if you was questioned on the train, or in some town."

Chapter XVII

PRISONERS OF WAR

ALL along the north shore of Lake Huron the buds had swelled and tiny green leaves were beginning to show on the maples and birches on the south slope of the ridges.

The keen saw bit smoothly into the two-foot trunk as the two men pulled it back and forth, back and forth. When it stuck they ceased pulling, and one of the men picked up a small iron wedge and drove it into the kerf behind the saw. He was a

large man with pale blue eyes, cold and expressionless as chipped ice. He pulled off his cap and his stiff blond hair stood straight up from his scalp like bristles on the back of a freshly scrubbed hog.

"These Canadians," he said in German, as he wiped the sweat from his brow, "they are fools. They think their forests will last forever." There was cold contempt in his voice. "For firewood they cut trees that would make wonderful lumber. And they care not where they fall. They take only the best, and if the tree in falling smashes many smaller trees, they do not care. In Germany we select each tree with care, taking only those which are crooked and damaged for firewood, carefully selecting the larger ones for that which they are best suited—this one for furniture, that one for flooring. My father was a forester. He loved the forest. It would have broken his heart to see these trees split up into firewood. I, too am a forester. But I am more practical."

The other smiled. "So?" There was a note of deference in his voice as he said, "But, Herr Brunner, in thus destroying their own forests are they not weakening their country? I was speaking to Karl only the other day about this, and when we notched the trees for falling, we purposely felled them where they would do the most harm to the young trees. But I have noticed that you fall them where they can do the least harm. Is this because you, too, love the forest?"

"Fool! I love nothing! If a man loves any concrete thing — a tree, a horse, a woman, a God—by just so much he weakens himself. Ernst Brunner loves only efficiency—efficiency for the good of the Reich! Heil Hitler. If a man allows himself to love, then at some time he will commit some act of favor to this thing he loves that might be of detriment to the Reich."

"Are you not, then, married?"

"Marriage! What has that to do with love? Yes, I am married. I have begotten three sons—three soldiers for the Reich. There is also a daughter. She too will bear sons for the Reich. She is German. My wife is German. She begets sons who are German—for the Reich—not because of love." The man laid aside the axe with which he had driven in the wedge. "Come," he ordered, "we will fall this tree. I see the guard is looking this way."

As the tree crashed the men laid the saw aside and picked up the axes. "But why then, if you do not love the forest," persisted the other, "do you fall the trees as you do?" He pointed to a thick stand of beautifully straight young maples to the left. "Had we fallen this tree among them, we would have damaged a great many."

The pale blue eyes rested upon the ruddy face of the other. "And thus, by just so many damaged trees we would have weakened the Reich. Fool! Do you not know that within a year this Canada will be German? For what do you think we are fighting? For possession of Poland? For Norway, and Denmark, and Holland? For France? No! We fight this war to oust the British from possession of the world! We will rid the world of the contemptible money-grabbing Jews. We will conquer the damned English — and the double-damned Americans. Bah!" He paused and spat viciously. "The swine! We are German. When this war is over, the German Reich will be the world."

The other nodded, a look of profound respect in his blue eyes. "Heil Hitler," he said, and sank his axe into the butt of a limb.

AN HOUR later, with the trunk clear of limbs, the large man picked up the saw. "Come," he said, "we cut that which should become the floor of a ballroom into pieces of wood to keep us warm."

A guard strolled past, his rifle slung carelessly over his shoulder. When he was out of hearing, the man again picked up the little iron wedge and fitted it to the kerf.

"This is the day," he said, in a voice devoid of any emotion. "The fat one is on guard."

Sudden color flooded the pink-shaven cheeks of the other, his blue eyes widening, like the eyes of a baby. "You mean," he gasped, "that now—today we—go away from here?"

"Of course—fool! Did you think I meant it is the day we have beef, instead of pork to eat?"

"But—I thought——"

"Save your thinking until you are alone! You will have need, then, of all the thinking of which you are capable. For once we are away from here we separate. It is every man for himself, then. As I explained, you are to find some means of crossing into the United States—into Wisconsin. The Americans are not yet at war with us, and they will not be vigilant. You have the names of those whom you are to contact?"

"Yes. Upon the cigarette paper between the layers of leather in the sole of my shoe."

"Good. I have already spoken to the others. There will be six of us—Keifer, Gottschalk, Ebensteiner, Schmidt, you, and I."

"Not my brother? Not Karl?" There was a note of disappointment in the man's voice. "Always we have been together in the army—Karl and I. Karl would like, also, to escape. He is there, near the top of the ridge."

"No, not Karl!" The other's gaze wavered and fell before the glare of the cold, pale eyes. "What is a brother, or not a brother? In the army are no brothers! I have picked the men to go. I have picked only those who speak English without accent. There are many English words Karl cannot pronounce without betraying his German birth. I have spent weeks in selecting the men. I know. Karl would be caught before he got one hundred miles away. Then he would be returned, and his head would be shaved, and he would go about among the others with a towel about his head to keep the sun from blistering his scalp, like those three fools who last fall crawled out through the drain.

"You have your orders. You will contact those men in Wisconsin, whose names are on the paper. They will put you in touch with the nearest German consul. Should the Americans close the consulates before you reach them, you will be passed on into Mexico. You see, on the ridge across the valley, that tall tree that stands out above the others? When the sun sinks behind that tree, it will be half past four. I timed it yesterday. At that moment we will slip into the forest, and away. We must all go at the same moment, otherwise the alarm would be given as soon as the guard missed one. That fat one is a fool—he will become excited when he finds us gone. There will be confusion. You have your orders."

"But with the guard moving about among us, one of us might be near him at the moment of escape. He would shoot."

"Let him shoot, then! He is no good—he could not hit a man dodging among the trees. Are you afraid of being shot?"

"No," the other answered, lowering his eyes. "Heil Hitler."

"Here, then is money. One hundred dollars. When you make your contacts you will be provided with more."

"But — did they not take away your money?" the other asked, as he thrust the bills into his pocket.

"Of course, fool. This money I got from a hollow stump here in the forest where it was placed last night by a trusted agent. Thanks," he said, with a glance of contempt toward the guard who stood staring out over the valley, "to the unwitting cooperation of the fat one."

"You mean he is helping us? He is an agent of the Reich?"

The other smiled thinly. "He was an agent of the Reich—but he did not know it. Two weeks ago I showed him a letter purported to be written to my brother in Chicago, in which I told this supposed

brother that I had been a fool to go back to the Fatherland and join the party. I told him the cause of the Reich was hopeless, and advised him to do everything in his power to defeat Germany in this war. I showed the letter to the fat one and told him that I had lived many years in Chicago, that my brother still lived there and I was trying to persuade him not to do as I had done and go back to Germany to fight for the Reich. In reality this supposed brother is none other than Gotlieb Harmann, an agent of the Reich who works under our consular service.

"The fat one agreed with me that such a letter might do the cause of Britain much good. He gladly agreed to slip it out and mail it—after I offered him my ring, which was a heavy gold one of value. In this letter I told this supposed brother to answer, but to address his answer to Oswald Hare, which is the name of the fat one, and to enclose therein a twenty-dollar bill. Then I told Hare that he should open the letter when it came — and if he found therein anything that could possibly injure the cause of Britain, to destroy it, or turn it over to his commanding officer—but that if he did not, then he should keep the bill for himself, and smuggle the letter to me. It seems," the man added dryly, "that he saw no harm in the reply. So he delivered the letter to me, after carefully reading it, and pocketing the bill. Could he have read the real message in either my letter or in the reply, he would have turned them in—but the messages were written with invisible ink. I outlined our plan and described the stump I had selected, and told him to place the money therein so I could get it today, as this day the fat one would be on guard here. And his reply furnished me the names of those we must contact—the names you have in your shoe."

There was profound admiration in the other's eyes. "But," he asked, "this invisible ink? Where did you get it?"

"It was kindly provided by the Canadian Government," the other replied, "and served to us at the table. It might be well for you to remember that onion juice makes an excellent invisible ink. The message written with onion juice remains invisible —until heat is applied to the paper. Then it stands out boldly for anyone to read."

"And do you, too, go to this Wisconsin?"

"No. My work is in Canada. I, too, have my orders. But come—do not be seen loitering. And keep your eye upon the sun. When the time comes there must be no delay."

AT THE exact moment the sun reached the appointed tree, the man who had given the orders relinquished his grip on the saw handle and dived into the underbrush. So sudden had been his action that the other straightened up and glanced about him. The fat guard stood twenty yards away, his gun on his shoulder. Then he, too, dashed for the cover of the brush. There was a loud-bawled order to halt, then the sound of a shot. A searing pain stabbed his thigh. His leg buckled, and he crashed face forward into the brush, rolled part way down the steep ridge, and brought up against a tree.

Brunner, hearing the order and the shot, redoubled his effort, dashing diagonally down the ridge in a northeasterly direction.

A half mile farther on he slackened his pace. The guards could not leave the other prisoners to pursue those who were escaping. The labor squad had been marched nearly two miles from the abandoned paper mill that was now a barbed wire prison camp, and the man knew that a considerable time would elapse before an alarm could be turned in and an organized search started. So he slackened his pace and jogged on. It was for this moment he had waited during the long weeks of his imprisonment, and for this he had systematically conditioned himself upon the labor squads, and upon the recreation field

provided by the Canadian Government for the prisoners of war.

Gotlieb Harmann's instructions had been simple and explicit. He was to proceed to Sudbury, fifty miles to the eastward on the King's Highway, and there contact one Patrick Haggerty, a haberdasher, and wait for further instructions. All others of the escape party were to cross over into the United States and contact those whose names were listed with the invisible ink.

Reaching the King's Highway he paralleled it, keeping to the bush. Half an hour later a car dashed past filled with guards armed with rifles. From the edge of the bush Brunner grinned his contempt as he watched it disappear in a cloud of dust.

Darkness overtook him and he pushed on. From a clothesline in the back yard of a house upon the edge of a small town he obtained a coarse workman's shirt, and a pair of faded overalls. He donned these in a thicket and buried his own clothing in the sand. Progress was slow in darkness relieved only by the little light of the glittering stars. Nevertheless he continued, keeping close to the road upon which cars passed, their headlights giving him his direction. Now and then he skirted a farm yard. Occasionally a dog would bark or growl as he hurried past, cursing under his breath.

When the moon rose he made better progress. But it was rough going at best, pushing through bush, stumbling among rocks, and slogging across marshy places, wet to the knees. As the hour grew later traffic thinned on the road, and the farmhouses were dark.

He came to a river, and edging cautiously onto the road, hastened across the bridge and into the brush again. The walking was easy on the bridge and he thought of taking to the edge of the road. He could make much better time. Surely he could encounter no pedestrians, and the headlights of the occasional cars would give him ample warning, so that he could slip back into the brush until they passed. He was considering the matter as he crossed a wide field. A car passed and he gazed longingly at the smooth firm sweep of the road that stretched away invitingly in the glare of the headlight. Then a figure appeared suddenly in the glare, and as the car came to an abrupt halt the man saw the uniform and the rifle—watched from behind a pile of stones as the figure inspected the car, opening both front and rear doors. Then the car moved on, and the figure merged into the shadows at the side of the road. After that Brunner thought no more of taking to the highway. He shrugged—if the fool had concealed himself back there at the bridge he, Ernst Brunner, might even now be on his way back to the prison camp at Espanola. The moon passed behind a cloud, and he hurriedly crossed the field and disappeared into the brush.

WHEN daylight came he drew further back from the road and pushed on. He was in a more open country now—a barren, fire-swept country of naked rock ridges and the blackened trunks of small trees. In a small stream he cleaned his shoes, washed the mud from his overalls, and ascending a ridge, curled up in a niche in the rocks. The sunshine felt warm, and he slept.

When he awoke he was hungry. He had eaten nothing since noon of the day before. He flexed his muscles. Thanks to the recreation ground and the labor squad he had been able to keep fit. Day and night during the months of his imprisonment he had plotted and planned for this. He had seen others attempt escape. Had watched closely—had talked with them before and after their attempts, and had profited by their mistakes. He, Ernst Brunner, would make no mistakes. Had not Gotlieb Harmann hinted in his letter that there was work for him to do in Sudbury—work for the Reich!

What was a little hunger? He could

go many hours—many days, if necessary, without eating. Tonight he would contact this Haggerty, and food would be given him along with his orders. The man scowled and turned over so the sun could dry the other side of his trousers legs. Haggerty—an Irishman! Why couldn't Harmann have found a German? Surely in Sudbury there must be Germans who would do anything in their power to further the cause of the Reich. To be sure the Irish hated the English — but could they be trusted? To hate the English is not enough—one must also love the Reich. They were fools, these Irish—they sought to get from under the British yoke by helping the Nazi cause. It would serve the traiterous dogs right when they found that they had tossed aside a yoke of feathers to don a yoke of lead. Heil Hitler! They would all be slaves—Irish, English, Poles, Frenchmen, Scandinavians, and also the damned Americans — all slaves working for the Reich. And the Jews! There would be no more Jews. Only Germans were fit to rule. Only the Herrenvolk were the born lords of the earth.

EARLY in the afternoon he pushed on. It became increasingly difficult to proceed unobserved because of the lack of underbrush. He feared that in traversing the naked ridges he would be more conspicuous even than if he were on the highway. He descended to the railway at a point where it ran side by side with the road, on the outskirts of a town of considerable size. A freight train rumbled past slowing almost to a standstill. Moving swiftly he clambered up and dropped into an empty coal car. His chances, he decided, were better here than on the road, or in the open rock country back from the road. With a series of jerks the train gathered speed and left the town behind.

Naughton was passed without incident. There was a long delay at Copper Cliff during which Brunner expected every minute to see a uniformed figure peer into his car. But nothing happened, and finally the train rumbled on.

CHAPTER XVIII

SUDBURY

WALKING briskly along a street in Sudbury, a workman in faded overalls and a coarse shirt, his face and hands grimy with coal dust, glanced at the shop windows. It was suppertime and there were many workmen upon the street—men off shift from the mines, returning to their homes. At a modest shop he paused and looked in the window, apparently mildly interested in the men's outfitting display. A man stepped from the open doorway, carrying a parcel. Inside, the proprietor was returning sundry cardboard boxes to their shelves.

The workman entered, glanced about, and stepped to the counter. "Are you Patrick Haggerty?" he asked, in perfect English.

"That's me. What can I do for you?"

"I am Ernst Brunner," the workman said, in an undertone. "Gotlieb Harmann instructed me to report here."

Without batting an eye, the man took down several boxes containing underwear, opened them and spread them upon the counter. He picked up a suit and held it up for the other's inspection. "You're lucky to get through. I had word that three escaped prisoners were caught. They say one got shot in the leg." He paused, glanced toward the sidewalk, and stepping around the counter, peered up and down the street. "Did anyone see you come in here?" he asked.

"No. I stopped and looked in the window till I was satisfied that I was not followed."

"Step behind the counter and slip into the back room. I'm closing the store in a few minutes."

Passing into a small back room littered with packing cases, the workman was

joined a short time later by the proprietor, who carried a complete change of clothing including shoes and a hat.

"Wash up there at the tap and get into these," he ordered. When the change was completed he glanced at the other with approval. "You'll do," he said, with a wink. "When we go out and get in the car you won't be noticed. I often take salesmen out to the house. Where did you get these?" he asked, picking up the discarded garments.

"From a clothesline in the yard of a house, many miles back along the road."

"I'll do this stuff up," Haggerty said, suiting the action to the word, "and tonight I'll burn it in the furnace. Tonight, also, my wife will dye your hair black."

Presently they stepped from the shop and into a car parked at the curb. "You will remain at my home until Harmann comes," Haggerty said, as he slipped behind the wheel. "He is stopping at a resort on Basswood Lake, near Thessalon. I'll phone this evening, and ask him how the fishing is. That will bring him here tomorrow."

"What is the nature of the work that is to be done?" Brunner asked, as they turned into a residence street.

Haggerty shook his head. "Harmann will have to tell you about that," he said. "All I know is that when this war is over Ireland will be a free country. Here in Canada, and in the United States, too, we have a closely knit alliance of Irishmen who are doing all we can to help you people."

Brunner nodded. "That is right," he said, heartily. "When we have smashed the British and the French and the damned Americans, then countries like Ireland, and India—all countries that have lived under the oppression of greater countries will be free. For the first time in their lives the people of those countries will know what freedom really means."

"We have been promised that—in return for our cooperation."

"Ah, yes. And a German promise may be depended upon."

TRUE to Haggerty's prediction, Gotlieb Harmann showed up in Sudbury next day. He spent the afternoon renewing acquaintances of whom he had many, and upon Haggerty's pressing invitation, accompanied him home to supper. He was a large man with the cold expressionless eyes of a gambler, but a good mixer—a hale fellow well met, who for ten years just prior to the war had been coming into Canada each summer for the fishing—though he almost never fished. An American citizen, and always well supplied with money, he made his headquarters at a popular resort near Thessalon and spent a great deal of time driving about the country in an imposing car, making acquaintances in every town from Sudbury to the Soo. When pressed, he referred vaguely to a business in Chicago. He took pains to make himself agreeable to those with whom he came into contact—albeit there were a few who wondered—those who heard him express his love for the bush country — but who knew that he never went into the bush—seldom in fact, ventured off the paved highways.

After supper, at a sign from Harmann, Haggerty and his wife stepped out to call on a neighbor. "You're the only one of the six that made a getaway," the man said, as the door closed behind the pair. "They caught three of 'em yesterday, and picked up the other two today. I've fixed it up with Haggerty to let you lay low here for awhile. Your name is John Casey. You are his wife's brother from Detroit, here on a visit. According to the dope I've got, you're a forester. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"Okay. Know anything about pulpwood?"

"Only in a general way. I have had no experience with pulpwood."

"That won't make any difference. You know how to cruise timber, don't you?"

"Cruise timber?"

"Sure—go into the bush and estimate how much standing timber there is on a certain property, and it's value?"

"Certainly, I can estimate the timber—but of its value, here in Canada, I know nothing."

"I'll get you the dope on that. Look—you're a timber cruiser up here to look over some pulpwood limits for a paper outfit in Michigan—get it?"

"Yes."

"Okay. I'll get busy and get hold of all the dope you need on this pulpwood game, and fix up your credentials, and everything you'll need to get by—letters of instruction written on company letter-heads and all that crap, so it won't look phoney. I'll have to go back across to do it, and it might take a couple of weeks or even a month. Meanwhile you stick right here till I get back and be Haggerty's brother-in-law—see?"

"Yes—but what has this estimating of pulpwood got to do with—with——"

"You'll know all about that when I get back," Harmann interrupted. "I'll bring your credentials, and your expense money and something else besides. Here come the Haggertys, now. I've stopped here before. She's hell-bent for an evening of bridge. I told him to get her out of the house for a few minutes so I could talk to you. She's a rotten player—I hope you get her for a partner."

IT WAS late in June when Harmann returned to Sudbury. He came to supper with Haggerty and carried a heavy suitcase from the car into the house. He viewed with approval Brunner's attire, a flannel shirt, brown canvas trousers and cruiser's pacs that showed plenty of rough usage.

"I see you've got the outfit broke in," he said, as the haberdasher left them alone for a moment. "You look like you'd been in the bush, all right."

"Each day I take a long walk among the hills and the ridges. I know every foot of the country within ten miles of the mines."

"The mines are not your worry," the other replied. "You'll know later. Haggerty's going to get his wife out of the house for awhile like he did last time, and then I'll tell you. When they come back we'll be in for another session of bridge."

Brunner smiled. "You don't need to worry about Maggie Haggerty," he said. "She is even more rabid against the English than her husband is."

Harmann shot him a glance. "Have you been talking?"

Brunner shrugged. "Naturally she knows who I am—of my escape from Espanola. I have talked only in generalities—of the future of Ireland under the benevolent sponsorship of the Feuhrer after the English have been brought to their knees. But I have listened, in patience I hope, to a recounting of the woes of Ireland from the time of Brian Boru to this very afternoon. And," he added with a grin—"tonight it is your turn to have her for a partner."

Alone in the house after supper, Harmann drew several papers from his pocket and handed them to the other. "Your credentials, and several letters written on the paper-mill stationery. They're signed with the name of the superintendent, and contain your instructions about looking over some pulpwood limits, Have you looked over that dope I mailed you—on specifications, price, and so on?"

"Yes, I have studied the matter thoroughly. But—before supper you said that the mines are not my worry. Why, then, am I in Sudbury? I supposed, of course, that this timber cruising was merely a blind to give me an excuse to be wandering about the country, and gain information about the mines."

Harmann frowned. "How much pulpwood did you find within ten miles of Sudbury—or twenty—or fifty? What hasn't been cut around here has been burned off.

As to the mines—we thought we had men in key positions for sabotage last year. But something went wrong. We don't know where those men are now—but we've got our own good guess. Your job calls for direct action. Your safety will depend on your ability to play your part. You were picked because you are supposed to have brains—but I don't know. Anyone who would cruise around here for pulpwood can't have a hell of a lot of brains."

Brunner flushed. "I mentioned nothing of pulpwood to anyone. No one questioned me as to my wanderings."

"Okay. But I'm warning you—if you are caught, you'll be shot. If you don't want to tackle this, now's the time to say so, and I'll slip you across into the States where the work is easier and less dangerous. We Americans don't know we're in the war yet—but we are."

"Are you hinting that I am a coward?" Brunner asked stiffly.

"Not hinting—only asking."

"What is this job of which you speak? I will accept it—and I will carry it through."

"You are to go to Hearst and put up there. You are a timber cruiser, and you will work out from there inspecting the pulpwood stands. You will make yourself and your business known to the citizens. Your immediate concern will be a certain railway bridge that spans the Kabinakagami River, about fifteen miles west of the town. You will study the lay of the land so you can find your way back from this bridge to Hearst afoot even in the dark.

"The Canadians have got some big training camps west of here—Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and they're shipping a hell of a lot of troops east for transportation to England. This bridge is on the main line of the C. N. and a lot of these troops roll east over that road. Your job is to blow up that bridge just ahead of a troop train. And that means just ahead—not a half hour ahead, or even fifteen minutes ahead, so it could be flagged down. Have you ever used dynamite?"

"Yes, in the removal of stumps and the building of roads through the forest, in Germany."

"Okay. In that suitcase are forty pounds of 80 percent dynamite, and some fuse." Reaching into his pocket, he handed the other a small tin box. "The caps are in there. Better not carry 'em in with the dynamite. If you do the job right, you ought to be able to pile up that train in the river and kill a couple of hundred or more soldiers besides gumming up the main line for a week or so. There's a hundred bridges we could have blown, but I picked this one so you could make a getaway. After the job is done you get back to Hearst as quick as you can. Then you can take the Algoma Central to the Soo, and cross over into Michigan."

Brunner nodded. "But these troops will be transported, doubtless, on special trains. How am I to know the exact time that one is expected?"

"That's my job. I'll be in Nakina, a hundred and forty-four miles west of Hearst. There's some lakes in there and I'll be on a fishing trip. It shouldn't take you more than a week to get the lay of the land. After that you stick right in town. I'll go to Nakina on the seventh of July and watch the trains. As soon after that as a troop train clears Nakina, I'll wire you the time it passed. There's a lot of northern pike up there in those lakes, and lake trout, too. The trout will mean the hour—the pike the minute the train leaves Nakina—like this. If it goes through at 3:45, I'll say 'Fishing good. Come on up. Caught three trout, forty-five pike.' Or if it's 10:15, I'll say, 'Caught ten trout, fifteen pike.' Get it?"

"Certainly."

"Okay. They run those trains at a good clip—fifty, sixty miles an hour. That should give you about two hours and a half to get out to the bridge—plenty of time if you've got the shot all capped and

fused and cached in a handy place near the bridge. Cut your fuse short and light it when you see the smoke of the train. Everything clear?"

"I understand perfectly."

"Okay. After you cross into Michigan, go to Chicago, and report at this address. Good luck to you. I hear the Haggertys on the porch. Now for a game of that damned bridge."

Chapter XIX

THE WAR DOES COME TO THE BUSH COUNTRY

SWEAT streamed down the man's face. His breath came in great panting sobs. For two hours—ever since he had received the telegram, "Fishing good. Come on up. Have caught twelve trout and thirty-six pike," he had been running through the bush over a course he had learned by heart—a course that held well back from the level bed of the railway. Now the bridge was in sight and Brunner glanced at his wrist-watch—2:45. The troop train had left Nakina two hours and nine minutes ago. If it was running at sixty he had just fifteen minutes to pick up the suitcase, cached in a rock crevice near the bridge, place it at the selected spot, and light the fuse timed for four minutes that protruded through a tiny hole punched in the side of the case.

The man smiled as he picked up the case and carried it to the bridge. Stepping out over the ties to the center, he lowered the case and slipped the hand grip over a strong spike he had driven into a tie close against one of the steel girders. He took the cigarette lighter from his pocket and snapped it open. It worked perfectly. He wiped the sweat from his face, and again glanced at his watch. It was two minutes after three. He gazed toward the west where a few hundred yards away the gleaming rails disappeared over a rise to reappear a mile farther on where the right of way seemed a mere slit in the forest of spruce, then disappeared altogether at the crest of another rise.

Brunner knew that this second rise was exactly four paced miles—just four minutes, for a train running at sixty miles an hour. So he had cut his fuse to explode the charge in four minutes from the time he would first sight the smoke at the top of the farther rise. Even if the train was making only fifty miles, and the charge should go off a full minute before it reached the bridge, there would be no chance to stop it and avert the catastrophe.

There was no sign of smoke yet, and Brunner glanced down into the water. His cold eyes narrowed, and a smile of anticipation curled the corners of his thin lips. Just a few minutes now, and this bridge upon which he was sitting would be a mass of broken ties, of twisted rails and girders — and down there in the water hundreds of men would be dying—drowning in the submerged coaches—dying horribly, their bodies torn and broken, pinned between crushing timbers, shrieking in agony as huge slivers from the broken wooden coaches pierced their bodies. And they would be young men—the flower of the Canadian army—not the old, and the fat, and the incompetent like those who guarded the prisoners at Espanola.

He licked his lips as though enjoying a delicious morsel of food. He wished he could stay and see it—could look on from some place of concealment and watch them die—hear their death screams—see the river running red with their blood. The fools! The poor, damned fools! To think that they could prevail against the Reich! The German Reich, whose long arm was reaching out to destroy them even in the fastness of their own wilderness! Bah! How could such expect to conquer the Herrenvolk?

But he could not wait to see the havoc his hand had wrought. His course was planned to the minutest detail. He would light the fuse, hasten from the bridge and

into the bush. Then for two hours he would run toward Hearst, keeping to the bush, over the route he had just come—a route upon which days of study had familiarized him with each tree and stone.

Then, a mile out of the town, he would stop at a small creek, regain his breath, bathe his sweating face, and stroll into the town—long before news of the catastrophe could reach there. For no one who had not practiced daily, could run for fifteen miles with the news, even on the level right of way. When the news finally came, he would go along with the others—and help to drag the dead from the river—cursing with the best of them the fiend who had perpetrated the foul deed. It was all beautifully planned. He frowned as he recalled Harmann's slurring remark. He'd show Harmann whether or not he had brains!

SUDDENLY he stiffened and centered his gaze on the track—on the notch four miles to the westward, where the right of way disappeared. Yes—black smoke was rising from the notch! The troop train was coming! Deliberately he took the lighter from his pocket, snapped it open, and with a steady hand, held the blue flame to the frayed end of the fuse. There was a sputtering, a curl of smoke, the acrid smell of burning powder, and Brunner leaped to his feet, and turned to run from the bridge—just as a hand car with six section hands appeared over the rise, scarce three hundred yards away! The hand car approached rapidly, reaching the western end of the bridge, almost at the moment Brunner dashed from the eastern end. A cold chill gripped Brunner's heart as he leaped a small drainage ditch and plunged into the bush—on the down-river side. His carefully plotted course was on the south side of the track—the up-river side, but to reach cover on that side he must traverse a hundred yards of open rock country—giving the men a chance to notice him. The hand car jarred to a sudden stop, and Brunner paused for a moment behind a scrub spruce. He saw a man leap from the car—point downward, drop to his knees and reach between the ties. Then he saw the suitcase plummet down and strike the water. Another pointed frantically toward the smoke of the onrushing train and the hand car moved swiftly off the bridge, eager hands lifting it from the track. Brunner ran, tearing through the bush—down-river. Behind him he could hear the shouts of the pursuing men—could hear the thud of their heavy feet, and the crashing of brush. Then the thudding and crashing was lost in a mighty roar as the explosive in the suitcase let go. A geyser of water rose high into the air a short distance behind him, and a mighty blast of air sent twigs and light branches flying about him. He dashed on, holding close to the river. If the section men gained on him, he would dive in and strike out for the other side—trusting that his pursuers could not swim. He rounded a bend—and there, caught in the branches of a tree that had fallen out across the water, was a canoe!

The noise of the train drowned out sounds of pursuit as it roared across the bridge. Then the shouts were again audible—closer, now that he had paused to release the light craft from the clutch of the branches. Snatching one of the two paddles from the bottom he stepped into the canoe—and pushed out into the current, just as two men appeared on a bare rock not twenty yards away.

Brunner's brow puckered as the canoe shot around a bend, and the men were lost to view. One of them he knew must have recognized him, as he shook a futile fist. He was a young man with whom he had played an occasional game of pool in the evening.

AS THE canoe glided on down the river the gravity of his position forced itself upon Brunner. He dared not turn back. As soon as the section men reached

Hearst with their story of his attempt to blow up the bridge and wreck the troop train, his description would go humming over the wires, and all Canada would be on the lookout for him. There were no roads, and the railways, the only outlet from the vast wilderness of spruce, were closed to him. He dared not show up in any town—the smaller the town the greater his danger—and on the C. N. all the towns were small. Even now Corporal Cameron, the Provincial policeman stationed at Hearst, or Sergeant Bliss of the far famed Royal Canadian Mounted Police might be listening to the tale of the section hands—the ugly tale of the suitcase with its sputtering fuse suspended close against the steel girder—of the onrushing troop train—and of the mighty explosion that had sent a geyser of water high into the air scarce a hundred yards below the bridge.

The section hand who had saved the troop train would become a national hero—while he, Ernst Brunner, was a hunted criminal with the hand of every man against him, fleeing away from civilization into a vast wilderness inhabited only by Indians and wild beasts—with no equipment save the clothes on his back, and the penknife in the pocket of his trousers. Stark terror gripped him. Where could he go? How could he survive? Very soon, now, in Hearst, Cameron, or the tall, grim-faced Bliss might be loading a canoe onto a hand-car and starting in pursuit. The man redoubled his effort at the paddle, cursing aloud in mingled terror and rage—terror of what lay before him, and rage at the section crew that had appeared suddenly over the rise and had caught him red-handed, rage at Harmann for sending him into this God-forsaken wilderness instead of detailing him to some act of sabotage at the mines where there were many men with whom he could have mingled, rage at himself for neglecting to peer over the rise and make sure that no section crew was at work in the long sag between the two rises in the roadbed.

THE map with which Harmann had provided him was in his room in the hotel in Hearst. Vaguely he remembered that the map showed a Hudson's Bay trading post on the Kabinakagami before its confluence with the Albany. He had money in his pocket. He could purchase supplies there, and make his way up the Albany where, he remembered, the map had shown that its headwaters, in a series of lakes, lay close to the railway far to the westward. It would take weeks—maybe well into the fall to reach there. In the meantime the hue and cry would have abated, and he would have grown a beard. It was possible that he could somehow manage to escape into the United States. But even with the thought came another that struck a new chill to his heart. The radio! Not only over the wires would his description go—but out over the air waves to the cities and towns, and to the uttermost reaches of the wilderness. Damn the radio! He knew that in Sudbury, and in Hearst every store and restaurant, and nearly every private home had a radio that blared out news broadcasts a dozen times a day. Surely the trading posts would have radios! Even now they were in all probability watching for him to show up on the river. But he would survive somehow. He must survive! Must survive to carry on the work of the Reich. Damn these Canadians—little did they know that within the year they would be slaves of Germany. And then—ah then—he would repay them a hundred fold for this thing they had done to him.

Toward evening he landed and drew the canoe out of sight behind a screen of brush. He killed a spruce hen with a stone and carried it back into the bush so that the smoke from his fire would not be visible from the river. Upon the edge of dark he dined upon the spruce hen and wild strawberries. He counted the matches in his waterproof container and lighted his fire with his pocket lighter, shutting off the flame quickly to save the precious fuel.

After he had eaten he smoked the last cigarette in his package, lighting it from a glowing brand. Gloomily he stared into the dying embers of his little fire. He had twenty-one matches, and the lighter which would soon be useless. He had no tent—no blankets. He dared not show up at the trading post. But—somehow, he must procure supplies—blankets, a change of clothing, a tent, matches, a gun, a hook and line to catch fish, a serviceable knife, tobacco and food. He could live for awhile as he was—but only for awhile. He had seen a porcupine lumbering clumsily across a small opening. He had heard of people eating hedgehogs. If worse came to worst, he, too, could eat one. But there were Indians scattered about the wilderness. He had seen Indians in Hearst—dumb, stolid looking people who stared at one blankly out of their dark eyes. Brunner's eyes went cold as blue ice, and the corners of his thin lips set grimly. He would find an Indian. Then he would have supplies.

Hardly had he concealed his canoe on the second evening when around a bend a short distance up-river swept another canoe. With clenched fists, Brunner watched from the cover of the bush as the craft shot swiftly past, his eyes on its single occupant—Sergeant Bliss, grim and capable looking, with the black leather holster at his belt, not twenty yards away. Brunner relaxed when the canoe disappeared around the next bend. He wiped the little beads of sweat from his forehead. He was glad he had concealed his canoe.

IN THE early dusk, four days later, Brunner landed on a point. He had passed the trading post two days before, sighting it from a bend above, he had waited and slipped past under cover of darkness. Pulling his canoe into the bush, he picked up a handful of stones and then started to hunt spruce hens. Crossing the point, he halted abruptly and stepped swiftly behind a stunted banksian. There, on the bank of the river, not a dozen yards from him, was a small brown tent, mended near the top with an irregular patch of white canvas. A canoe was drawn clear of the water upon a strip of gravel. The flaps of the tent were thrown back giving Brunner a view of the interior. A figure was crouched before the doorway. A match flared in the semi-darkness, and then went out. The figure rearranged a little pile of sticks and bark and reached into a pocket for another match, turning his profile. Brunner saw that the man was an Indian—an old man—and alone. Tensing his muscles he crossed the intervening space in three swift leaps, and as the startled figure half rose to its feet, the German's strong hands gripped its throat. The man writhed and struggled to free himself from the deadly grip. His mouth gaped open, and his eyes widened until they threatened to pop from their sockets, and his chest heaved in futile effort to pump air into his tortured lungs. Gradually the struggles became more and more feeble, the tongue protruded from between the blue lips, and then the form went suddenly limp.

Without loosening his hold on the throat, Brunner dragged the man back into the bush and with a muttered curse hurled him to the ground where he lay, limp and lifeless. Stooping he slipped his hand beneath the man's shirt. He could feel no slightest flutter of the heart. Deliberately he took the penknife from his pocket, opened a blade, and with a swift, sure stroke severed the jugular vein. As the red blood gushed from the wound and sank into the ground, Brunner wiped the blade on the man's shirt, and returned the knife to his pocket. Then he returned to the tent, pulled the pegs, folded it, drew it into the bush. Procuring his own canoe, he paddled it around the point, and throwing the tent and its contents into it, shoved off.

Brunner had his supplies.

Helene Bovee held the canoe steady at the edge of the slowly revolving

eddy in the Albany River at the mouth of Cabin Creek, while Sister Marie removed the fish from the gill net and then dropped them into the bottom where they flopped about splashing drops of water upon the clothing of the two. When the last fish had been gathered they reset the net and paddled ashore where the two children waited in round-eyed expectancy.

A half hour later the girl paused in her work of cleaning and splitting the fish for smoking, to glance at a canoe that was approaching from down-river, hugging the shore. Suddenly she stiffened and, shading her eyes with her hand, gazed intently at the approaching craft, and its single occupant. Then hurriedly rinsing her hands in the river, sheathed her knife, and leaped to her feet, her eyes alight.

"Stan!" she cried. "It is Stan! He did not go to war. He has come back—back to me, here! That canoe—I would know it anywhere."

Sister Marie, squatting at the edge of the river, continued to gut fish. The two children crowded close to the girl jumping up and down in delight that their idol was returning, and calling his name, "Stan! Stan!"

The girl tore loose the red bandanna that bound up her hair and waved it frantically. Then the hand dropped to her side, and the other clutched at her heart, as the color slowly drained from her cheeks, leaving them chalky white — like dead ivory. For as the man in the canoe drew closer, she saw that it was not Stan Klaska, with his heavy chestnut beard. The man in the canoe was hatless. His hair was jet black, but his short stubble of beard was blond, and blond was the thick mat of hair that showed at the open front of his shirt. The man had evidently just sighted them. He hesitated, stared intently, then apparently satisfied, resumed his paddling. And Helene stood there a deadly fear clutching with icy fingers at her heart. The canoe was Stan's canoe—but the man was not Stan! Had something happened to him? Had he fallen into the hands of the police? And would they hang him for a murder he never committed?

The canoe grounded on the gravel, and the man stepped out. Helene glanced into the face with its thin lips and its cold hard eyes. Then her glance dropped to the canoe with the heavy pack in the front, and the folded tent amidship—a brown tent, mended with an irregular patch of white canvas, on top of which lay a rifle.

"You here alone?" the stranger asked, his cold blue eyes sweeping the four people with a glance. "Where are the men?"

Helene summoned a smile. "There are no men. Only we, who are here." She continued to stare at the canoe. "My brother gone to war—to fight Germans."

"What are you looking at?" the man demanded.

"This canoe—where did you get it?"

"Have you seen it before?"

"Yes. It belongs to man who has gone also to fight Germans."

Sudden rage seized Brunner. "Fight Germans, eh? Well there will be one less man to fight Germans! The man who owned this canoe is dead—I killed him! Killed him and took his canoe. And I killed the man who owned that tent and that pack-sack, too! He was an Indian Who are you to talk of fighting Germans? Before I leave here I will kill you all!" The look of insane hate in the man's eyes changed to an even more terrifying look as the eyes shifted from the mass of long black hair that cascaded about the girl's shoulders to the rounded breasts that bulged her flannel shirt. "But first," he added, "before I kill you, there is another thing that I will do. I have not had a woman for many days—and before that, for many long weeks — in your damned prison camp!"

He lunged toward her, his strong hands outstretched. Helene leaped swiftly aside, just as Sister Marie, her beady old eyes blazing like coals of fire, sprang toward

him with knife upraised. Before she could strike the man raised his foot and drove his heavy pac into her stomach with a force that sent her crashing against a jagged rock where she fell, blood gushing from between her writhing lips as the knife clattered upon the rocks beside her.

Again the man whirled upon Helene who had picked up a rock fragment and drawn back her arm. With his eyes on the fragment the man hesitated for an instant—and suddenly whirled and uttered a yowl of mingled pain and rage, as the little boy drove the knife he had snatched from the ground deeply into his buttock. Cursing like a mad man he stooped to reach for the boy. Snatching her knife from its sheath at her belt, Helene leaped forward and plunged the seven-inch blade, whetted to a razor edge into the man's back just to the left of his spine.

He straightened convulsively, and then turned to face her—a look of surprise and of mortal terror in his fast glazing eyes. Then, with a low, choking sigh, his knees buckled beneath him, and he crashed forward upon his face.

Ernst Brunner was dead. Dead also was Sister Marie when Helene bent over her a moment later. And this was the scene into which Sergeant Bliss stepped a few minutes later as he beached his canoe beside the other on the gravel.

"What came off here?" the sergeant demanded, shifting his glance from the two bodies lying among the rocks to the face of the girl.

Helene pointed to the body of the man that lay on its face, the knife hilt protruding from his back. "He land here where Sister Marie and I clean fish. He ask, 'You alone here? Where are men?' I tell him my brother gone to war to fight Germans. I ask him where he get canoe. He ask have I seen canoe before. I tell him yes, it belongs to man who has gone to fight Germans also. Then he get very mad. He say there is one less man to fight Germans because he kill man who owned canoe. He say he kill Indian, too, and he will kill us all—but first he will—will——" The girl's voice faltered. "He came at me to take me in his arms, and Sister Marie came at him with knife. He kick Sister Marie in belly and she fall back against rock and die. He came at me again and I have rock in my hand to hit him and he stop and Toto," she paused and pointed to the little boy, "grab up knife Sister Marie drop, and stab him behind, and he yell and turn to grab Toto, and I stab him in back and he is dead."

"Well—I'll be damned!" Sergeant Bliss exclaimed, a look of frank admiration in his eyes. "You say he admitted killing two men—and you killed him single handed with a knife?"

"Yes. And I am not sorry. I am glad. Because he kill old Sesawbig — that is Sesawbig's tent with the patch on it. And he kill Stan Klaska."

"Stan Klaska?" The sergeant's brow drew into a frown. "Stan Klaska," he repeated, as though trying to place the name. "Oh, sure. Wanted for a murder committed last year in Blind River."

"But he did not kill that man."

"What? How do you know he didn't kill him. Do you know this Klaska?"

"Yes, I know him. He is good man. Last summer he come—" She paused and pointed to the burnt country to the northward. "He save me, and Sister Marie, and babies from fire. All winter he live beside us here on Cabin River. He did not kill that man."

"How do you know he didn't?"

"Because he say he did not kill him. And I look into his eyes when he say it—and I know he tell truth."

THE sergeant shrugged. "Well—it don't make any difference, now he's dead. We can write him off the books. I know that this man here," he nudged the body with the toe of his boot, "killed old Sesawbig. An Indian found the body cached in the bush a little ways back from the river,

just below the mouth of the Drowning, and reported it to me at the post. I struck out after him and sighted him just as he landed. I know more than that about him, too. He tried to blow up a troop train west of Hearst, and damn near got away with it. We knew he headed down the Kabinakagami and I was laying for him at the post. I knew it wouldn't be long before some Indian would report a strange white man in the country."

The officer paused and grasping the body by the shoulder, turned it upon its back, and pointed to the stubble of blond beard, and the mat of blond hair that showed on the chest—then at the black hair of his head. "That don't jibe," he said, and stooping seized a lock and pulling it back pointed to the eighth of an inch of yellow at the roots. "Dyed—just as I thought. And he's another bird we can write off the books—the last of the six German prisoners that escaped from Espanola!"

"A German?" the girl cried. "Then I am more glad I kill him. The Germans kill my papa, a long time ago—in other war."

"What's your name?" the sergeant asked, abruptly.

"Helene Bovee."

"You've done a swell job, Helene," he said. "A damn swell job! And you bet, they'll be hearing of this—down in the Provinces."

The two bodies were buried, and the sergeant stepped into his canoe. When he had disappeared down the river, Helene stood for a long time gazing silently out over the water. Then in a sudden despairing motion she stretched out her arms to the southward. "Oh, Stan—Stan! You would have come back to me! In my heart I know you would have come back. But—" her voice broke, and with a swift motion she drew the keen knife from the sheath at her belt—the knife she had drawn from the heart of the dead German, and placed the point against her own heart. There was a whimpering sound behind her. She turned and stared dully down at the two children. Then slowly she sheathed the knife.

"Come," she said. "Gather some bark and I will make fire and cook our supper. Then we take fish to cabin."

Chapter XX

Blind River

IT WAS mid-afternoon when Stan stepped from the train at Blind River. Half a dozen soldiers in uniform boarded the train and Stan recognized one of them as a former swamper at Camp 32. He turned to an old man seated on a beer keg gumming a quid of tobacco.

"Where are they going?" he asked.

The oldster nested his quid in his cheek and spat. "Soo," he said. "Guardin' the locks. Live here. Got couple days off. Come home to see their girls."

"Guarding the locks! Guarding 'em against what?"

"Agin the Germans! What d'you s'pose?"

"Cripes — the Germans aren't headed this way yet, are they?" Stan grinned.

"'Tain't the ones that's headed—it's the ones that's here. They's plenty of dirty bums livin' right here in Canady that would like to see the Germans win. They claim some of 'em's drawin' pay from Germany an' layin' back to do some kind of dirty work—like blowin' up the locks, er somethin'."

"They ought to hang the guys," Stan said.

"Got to ketch 'em first. They pick up the odd one, now an' then. Ketched one right here in the mill. He was drivin' rail spikes in the logs. When the saws hit them spikes it would of throw'd teeth all over the place. But they never hung him—jest tuk him off to some jail."

The train pulled out. The oldster sauntered away to a seat on the shady side of

the filling station across the tracks, and Stan stood alone on the platform. The wind was southerly and he filled his lungs with air fresh off Lake Huron in which the familiar smell of the marshes was blended with the clean odor of new pine sawdust. He glanced toward the mill. Smoke issued from the huge stack, and faintly to his ears came the steady whine of the saws.

He turned, crossed the tracks, and then paused beside the filling station at the jog in the King's Highway. His glance rested for a moment on the water tap where he had washed his face and hands before returning to the dance that night, to tell Rose Brady that he had fought with Joe Bedore and Jack McVane. He shifted his glance to the scene of the fight, just across the street. It was as though it had happened the night before—the fight in the fog. And when the fight was over Joe Bedore lay there—half on the sidewalk, half in the street—and a mill hand lay in the gutter beyond, and there were hats lying around, and the two halves of a brown coat.

A car drove up, and the attendant came out to service it. He was an old man, and his movements were slow and deliberate. Stan crossed the King's Highway and walked north, past the church, past the house next door. Miss Goss lived there. He wondered if she were still teaching school at Nemegos. Continuing on to the edge of town, he stood for a long time leaning on a rail of a small bridge, looking out over the stump-dotted backwater where he used to shoot ducks. Then he turned back, swung onto another street, and walked slowly past Rose Brady's house. It looked the same, except for a fresh coat of paint—the same flower garden on one side of the walk, and the tiny grass plot on the other. The front door stood open, but no one was in sight, and he strolled on.

He stepped into a taven, seated himself at a table, and ordered a bottle of beer and a sandwich. Several men were seated at tables drinking beer. Some of them were tipsy. They talked loud, and Stan noticed that they wore calked boots. But they were old men—men well up in the fifties.

"Be a hell of a time at the dance tonight," one opined. "Sure ought to be gals enough to go 'round this year—with all the young bucks in the army."

"Yer damn right—gives us old uns a chanct to shake a leg with someone besides a squaw."

Stan finished his sandwich and stepped out onto the street. A man came toward him and he stiffened as he recognized Andy Laddy, the local constable. He had known Andy well. Here would be the first real test of his disguise. They met face to face in front of the drug store. Laddy glanced at him, nodded, and then paused.

"Stranger in town?" he asked, genially.

Stan nodded. "Yes."

The officer glanced at his shoes. "Didn't come down with the drive?"

"No. Be'n working in the pulpwood, up around Mattice."

"Got your card?"

Stan drew the registration card from his pocket and handed it to the other, who glanced at it, and handed it back. "I'm heading for the Soo to enlist," he said. "Stopped off to see a guy I know. George Blanton—used to run the filling station up there where the road jogs. But he isn't there any more."

"Nope, George he enlisted early in the spring. Most all the young fellows are gone. I'd go myself, if I was ten years younger. Good luck to you."

"Thanks," Stan said, and passed on. He cut down a side street and entered the abandoned garage. Voices sounded from beyond the partition, and he passed through the door into the back room. Spikey stood behind the bar.

"What'll it be?" he asked.

"Whiskey," Stan said, and when the glass was placed before him he glanced

about him. A dozen men in calked boots were drinking at the bar, or stood in small groups talking with others, evidently mill hands.

"We fetched 'em down, by God!" a man was boasting.

Old man Allard frowned. "Yeah—but she was a hell of a drive. Why, we're a month late! Last year we boomed 'em on the thirteenth of June, an' here it is the fourteenth of July!"

"Yeah, but you gotta figger the trouble we had," another said. "What with a jam at Squaw Chute, an' another at Slate Falls, an' low water till we hit Snowshoe Crick when they let the Clear Lake water in."

"Yeah," old man Allard retorted. "But if I'd had young fellers, instead of a gang of old cripples, we'd of beat the low water —an' we wouldn't of got them jams, neither. You birds ought to be out in the bush somewheres cuttin' pulpwood er cedar posts. The half of you don't know a saw log from a link of baloney—an' them that does is too stiff an' slow to do anything about it. "

"You was damn lucky to git any crew at all—what with all the young fellers in the army," a man said resentfully.

"Might as well not had none," Allard retorted. "Hell—that drive didn't beat the cemetery more'n five years!"

"You ain't so damn young, yerself," a man said. "Hell, you must be seventy."

"Sixty-eight," Allard corrected, "an' as good as any two of you, jest as I stand. There ain't no use augerin'. The logs is in—an' tonight, we'll whoop her up at the dance."

The dance! The drive was in and tonight was the big night in Blind River. Vaguely Stan wondered, as he stood there staring down at the whiskey in his glass, whether the fog would come drifting in off the lake with the darkness. Rose Brady would be there. Who would she go to the dance with this year—with both himself and Jack McVane out of the picture? He would go and see. He wouldn't dance—just go and stand in the doorway and look on. He wondered whether big "Moose" Sanjon would be there thumping on his drums. He moved over beside old man Allard who had called for another drink. "I see the saw-mill's running," he said. "How does that come—if the drive's just in?"

"More old man's work!" Allard snorted. "Everyone that's any good is in the army. They ain't finished last year's cut. Hell —they'd had plenty of logs to work on if we hadn't got in till August."

"I see by the paper where Jack McVane got another plane. That makes thirteen fer him," Spikey said. "By God that lad's some flyer!"

"He is that," Allard agreed. "He was always a wild reckless young devil. It's them kind would make good flyers."

"I allus figgered Jimmie McVane was worth a dozen of Jack," Spikey continued, stooping to rinse a glass in the tub. "But here they both 'list 'bout the same time, an' Jack's a lieutenant an' gits his name in the papers right along, an' Jimmie ain't nothin' but a sergeant, er somethin'."

"Jimmie is worth a dozen of Jack," Allard said. "He ain't had the chanct to show up like Jack has, that's all."

"Huh—if Jimmie's so damn good," demanded a drunken mill hand, "why didn't he fetch Stan Klaska in that time that he ketched up with him on Minnechenaqua? Instead of which, Stan knocked the hell outa him, an' kep' on a-goin'—an' by God, he's a-goin' yet, fer all anyone knows!"

"Yeah," chimed in another, "an' not only that, Stan got away from Pussy Hare on Nemegos Lake, besides—took Pussy's gun an' shoes away from him, an' went off in Pussy's boat, leavin' him barefoot down to the end of the lake. Slim Taylor told me about it—an' Pussy'd of be'n there yet, hadn't be'n fer Slim goin' down an' fetchin' him back."

"There's a fightin' guy fer you—Stan Klaska. Too bad he ain't in the army."

"Hell, he wouldn't dast to show up nowheres to 'list. Besides, he's prob'ly to

hell an' gone down in the States somewheres. Slim claimed he hopped that freight — but they wasn't never able to ketch him."

"They ought to hang the damn coot if they ever do ketch him—knifin' Joe Bedore the way he done—jest because Joe wouldn't turn out fer him on the road!" opined the mill hand.

Old man Allard favored the speaker with a sidewise glance. "I s'pose you seen him knife Bedore, eh?"

"No, I wasn't even in town that night. But Jack McVane an' Bill Crosby both seen a knife in his hand durin' the fight. An' Spikey here, an' plenty others know'd he was huntin' Bedore. Who else would knife him?"

"Mebbe Jack McVane had an axe of his own to grind," Allard said. "With Stan out of the way, he'd have Rose Brady all to hisself. An' as fer Bill Crosby—hell, he'd lie fer nothin', if he could git a dollar an' a half fer tellin' the truth!"

"Jest the same," the other retorted, "I'll bet Rose Brady's glad she tuk Jack instead of that damn murderin' Klaska."

"She ain't took him yet," Allard said.

"Jest as good as. It was in the paper before Jack went away how they was engaged."

"I claim Stan's the best man of the two," old man Allard insisted. "Hell, didn't he fetch Jimmie McVane clean back to the Mississagi Road after that scrap they had on Minnechenaqua? It took a man to do that—when he could of left him there on that island. Jimmie told about it hisself. A man that would do that, in the fix he was in, ain't a man that would knife anyone fer holdin' him back on a road."

Spikey leaned his elbows on the bar and held a match to the stub of a cigar. "Stan Klaska was drunk, that night, er he wouldn't of done it," he said. "Stud right there where you're standin' now, an' throw'd one whiskey after another into him. Never seen him like that before. He was huntin' Bedore, all right. I warned the damn Frenchman to keep away from him till he sobered up—but he wouldn't listen."

"Drunk 'er sober, I don't believe he done it," Allard insisted. "There was more than Stan in that fight."

"But who else would of?" demanded the mill hand. "Everyone knows Stan had threatened Bedore, an' was huntin' him."

"Jack McVane could of done it—er Bill Crosby, either."

SPIKEY rolled the cigar butt from one corner of his mouth to the other. As the drunken mill hand moved along to join in a maudlin discussion near the end of the bar, he leaned toward Allard, speaking out of the corner of his mouth. "Bedore told me, that night, that Jack McVane had it in fer him an' had threatened to git him, on account Bedore rutted him an' his truck off'n the road, one time, on Camp 22 hill an' rolled him into the ditch. I ain't never said nothin' about it—but I will when the time comes—like if they'd ketch Stan an' try him fer murder."

"They won't ketch Stan," Allard said. "The police is damn fools if they think he got out on the railway. Stan's a bush man—an' by God, he'd take to the bush. I'm bettin' he's right now around the Bay, somewheres."

"But Slim Taylor claimed he hopped that freight, that day. An' Slim ain't no damn fool."

Allard grinned and winked. "Listen, if you was a friend of Stan's, an' you didn't believe he knifed Bedore, an' he showed up to your place, headin' into the bush, an' a big fat jug-head like Pussy Hare come huntin' him—would you tell Pussy that he went on into the bush, er would you tell him he hopped the freight?"

"But Pussy found Stan's pack where he'd cached it right there beside the track. Hell, if a man's headin' fer the bush, he ain't goin' in without no pack."

Allard's grin widened. "I s'pose Slim didn't have no other packs in his store that

Stan could of got. I take notice there wasn't nothin' said about findin' Stan's rifle —that there three hundred gun of Phil Billips's that he got out of the shack at Camp 29."

"That's right," Spikey admitted.

"Sure it's right! What the hell would a man like Stan do down in the States? Why, he wouldn't even stay in Blind River! Ruther be in the bush, guidin' fer four dollars a day, than run a saw in the mill fer ten. Nussir—he got beyond the railways, an' Slim Taylor helped him. Slim's smart. Talks common, like you an' me—but he's the only one around these parts that kin add up what's goin' on outside of Algoma. I seen him last summer when he was down huntin' pulpwood cutters, an' he claimed that we'd be fightin' Germany before Chris'mas. An' by God, we was! He seen it comin'. An' what I claim—if a guy like Slim Taylor could see it comin', why couldn't the ones that runs the Gover'mint seen it comin' an' got ready fer it?"

"That's right," Spikey agreed. "By God, I'll bet he planted Stan's pack where Pussy Hare could find it!"

"Sure he did. Pussy ain't no wider between the ears than what he is dry behind 'em. Got kicked outa the Provincials an' went into the army. I heer'd how old Sam Hare's be'n tryin' to git him some kind of a commission down there in Ottawa. But I guess all the commission that Pussy'll git will be latrine adjutant, er somethin'—after what come off down at Espanola."

"What's that?"

"Oh, when Pussy enlisted they seen how he wouldn't be worth a damn overseas, so they sent him to Espanola to help the Old Sweats guard them German prisoners, an' along this spring he let six of 'em git away."

"Git away! You mean they busted out?"

"Not out of the camp. But they've be'n marchin' labor squads out in the bush to cut firewood an' what-not—an' Pussy was guardin' one of these here labor squads—an' when he marched 'em back there was six of 'em missin'. The army didn't give it out—but I seen Hake Hicks when he was home, an' he told me about it. Hake, he's down there to Espanola, too. He says they ketched five of 'em—shot one of 'em in the leg. But there's one still missin'. So they locked Pussy up an' when they git around to it they're goin' to have some kind of a trial."

"Seems like I heard about some prisoner gittin' shot, er somethin'," Spikey said. "Hell—they'd ought to hang Pussy —lettin' prisoners git away! No tellin' what them Nazis do, onct they git loose."

"They ought to do somethin' with him," Allard agreed. "Pussy, he lacks a week's pay of bein' worth a damn—anywheres you put him. It's a wonder some of them Old Lead Swingers ain't shot him before this."

The door swung open and a man in calked boots entered and staggered to the bar between Allard and the group of tipsy rivermen and mill hands. He was a young man, evidently in his twenties. "Gimme a shot of licker," he demanded.

Spikey moved along to face him across the bar. "You can't git nothin' here, Tom," he said.

"The hell I can't! What's the matter? Ain't my money good as anyone else's?"

"Yer drunk, now. You don't need no more."

"Who says I'm drunk? By God, I got as good a right to git drunk as anyone else, ain't I? I'm as good as the next man, ain't I?"

"If you was worth a damn you'd be in the army with the rest of the young fellas," Spikey said. "Why don't you go an' enlist?"

"By God, if they want me they've got to come an' git me! I ain't goin' to enlist. This is a money war, like the last one."

A sawyer moved over and jostled the man with his shoulder.

"Hey—who you shovin' around?"

The sawyer, himself halfseas over, said

bluntly, "You. Like Spikey says, why ain't you in the army?"

Sudden rage gripped the man. "To hell with you! To hell with the whole bunch of you! An' you, too," he yelled, turning on old man Allard. "I worked on the drive, an' done a damn sight more work than most of 'em—an' you was always throwin' it into me."

"They wouldn't be throwin' it into you in the army," Allard said, eyeing him coldly.

"To hell with the army! They're nothin' but a lot of damn bums—"

The sawyer's fist caught the man squarely on the side of the jaw and sent him crashing against the wall where he sank to the floor and lay still.

Old man Allard's glance shifted from the limp form to the face of the big sawyer. "You hadn't ought to hit him, Gus," he said. "Mebbe he's got more excuse fer bein' what he is than most of us would."

"Tom Strake never was worth a damn," the mill hand said. "Why ain't he in the army?"

"He wouldn't be worth a damn in the army, neither," Spikey opined, "onlest he'd git in the road of a bullet that was headed fer some reg'lar guy. Always goin' around claimin' he's good as the next man."

ALLARD nodded. "That's because everyone's always looked down on him—an' he knows it. Prob'ly started in school—you know how boys it. Everyone knows his ma an' old Fred Strake wasn't married. An' look at them two sisters of his—nothin' but a couple of chippies. He knows that—an' he knows other folks knows it."

"I got two boys overseas," the sawyer said. "An' if a man's ma wasn't married, an' his sisters is two chippies it don't give him no license to tell off the army. Not if I'm around, it don't—by a damn sight!"

Stan downed his liquor, and stepped out of the place. He walked slowly up the street, past neat looking homes, their little front grass plots enclosed by painted fences, past unpainted, ramshackle houses, with the week's wash dryng on lines strung on the front porches. A stench met his nostrils, and a raucous noise. Half a dozen small boys passed him, walking in the street. One dragged a dead skunk on the end of a string, and the others crowded about him laughing and shouting. One boy brought up the rear, beating lustily upon an old tin dishpan with a stick. He caught Stan's eye.

"I'm Moose Sanjon," he boasted proudly, "an' this is my drum."

A pick-up truck rattled past, clanging and clashing along the rock-studded street, one flopping fender trussed up with wire, blue smoke coughing from the exhause to blend with the odor of the skunk.

Blind River! A wave of disgust swept over Stan as he walked slowly along the sordid street. Blind River, with its blended sounds and its blended stinks—the rattle of trucks and the thumping of tin pans and the whine of the saws—the odor of the marshes, the stench of gasoline fumes, and dead skunks, on the streets, and inside, the smell of liquor, stale tobacco, and human bodies. Fights in Spikey's place, and tonight more fights at the dance. This was the town Rose Brady would have him live in—twelve long months in the year. To hell with Blind River! To hell with any town! He thought of Rose Brady as he had last seen her—sitting there in the dance hall looking angrily up at him as he stood before her with his black eye, and his smashed nose, and his torn coat while all the others looked on. "Go to the bush! Men like you don't belong in a town." "Rose was right," he muttered to himself. "I don't belong in a town—thank God, I don't belong in a town."

He turned a corner and there, coming toward him, walking with a young man in uniform, was Rose Brady herself. Stan recognized the man as a local boy against whom he had played hockey on the high

school team—remembered he had cracked a couple of ribs for him with a butt-end jab of his stick, a trick taught him by Phil Billips. He grinned behind his beard—Thessalon sure had a team, that year. With Phil Billips coaching they had won nineteen games and lost none—cleaned up every team between Sudbury and the Soo, and the American Soo besides.

The two turned in at a soft drink parlor. As Stan passed he glanced through the window. They were seated at a table. He turned and entered the place. Rose looked up and their eyes met. There was no hint of recognition in the blue eyes. He slipped into a chair at a neighboring table. A girl brought two bottles of coke with straws sticking out of the necks and placed them before the two at the other table, and stepped over to Stan.

"What's yours?" she asked.

"Ice cream—chocolate," Stan said. Rose Brady's eyes were as blue as ever, he was thinking. He remembered how a glance from those eyes used to thrill him. But there was no thrill in their glance now. Again she glanced toward him and their eyes met for a second—vaguely Stan wondered why his pulse beats did not quicken at the glance.

"I see by the paper where Jack got himself another plane," the man in uniform was saying. "Gee, I wish I'd gone in for flying! You must be awful proud of him, Rose."

The girl nodded, without taking the straw from her lips. "Yes," she said, when she had sucked the bottle half empty. "That must make about a dozen."

"Thirteen," the soldier corrected.

"Uh-huh, somewhere around there. I can't keep track of 'em. Say, Roy—what do you want me to wear to the dance tonight?"

Stan finished his ice cream, paid for it, and stepped out onto the street.

To hell with Blind River, with its stinks and its noises. To hell with stopping over for the dance. As he walked slowly toward the King's Highway, he was thinking of the bush country — of nameless lakes, of spruce spires against the sunset, of new rivers calling, of the purple haze on distant ridges, of the tang of spruce smoke beside the campfire, of a huge moss-covered rock, and the river rippling past, of soft brown eyes—of Helene, with the bright red feather in her hair.

He came to the King's Highway—to the filling station at the jog of the road. A car drove up headed west. Stan crossed the road, and accosted the driver, as the elderly service man lifted the gas hose from the hook.

"Got room for a passenger?" he asked. "I'll pay for the gas. Going to the Soo to enlist."

"Hop in," the man said, "and to hell with paying for the gas. I only go as far as Thessalon—but you're welcome to a ride. Tried to enlist myself—but they won't take a guy with a rupture."

CHAPTER XXI

THESSALON

AS THE car sped westward along the King's Highway Stan Klaska's eyes rested moodily upon the stumpdotted backwater with the tiny wavelets flashing in the sun. He remembered that night a year and a month ago when he had nosed his empty truck down that road through the fog, cursing Joe Bedore, fuming at being late for the dance — the dance that was to change the whole course of his life. It was right here he had picked up the two Indian girls, with their rouged lips and crimson fingernails. He remembered how beautiful he thought Rose looked that night as she opened the door when he called for her. He remembered her at the dance whirling about the floor in the arms of Jack McVane. And her disapproval of his determination to guide instead of work in the sawmill. And vividly he recalled her last words to him,

there in the dance hall with all the people looking on. "Go to the bush! Men like you don't belong in a town."

And now Rose Brady was engaged to Jack McVane. And Jack was in the R.A.F. He had seen Rose only a quarter of an hour ago. Vaguely he wondered that he had felt no stab of jealousy when he saw her in company with the good looking young man in uniform, nor that he had felt no slightest thrill at his proximity to her as he sat at a nearby table and watched her sipping coke through a straw. Jack's welcome to her, he thought to himself as he remembered how quickly she had shifted the subject to her costume for the forthcoming dance when her soldier escort had referred to Jack McVane's latest exploit. The men in Spikey's barroom knew the exact number of the German planes Jack had shot down—so did the young soldier. But Rose didn't know—nor did she seem particularly to care.

As they passed through Iron Bridge the attendant at the filling station waved listlessly at the driver of the car, as he had waved the morning after the fight, when Stan had passed through the town, sick as a dog, hauling his last load up the Mississagi Road.

Near Sowerby they passed the farm of old man Gordon, Ella Taylor's father, and he thought of Slim Taylor, the only man in Algoma apparently who had had sense enough to see the war coming. And now Slim was somewhere overseas—and Ella was running the store at Nemegos. And far to the northward, on Cabin River was Helene. Maybe she was even at this moment standing there on the moss-covered rock—with the bright red feather in her hair.

Damn this man, Hitler! Who was he to change the lives of everybody in the world? It's a pity they didn't strangle him at birth.

It was late in the afternoon when Stan stepped from the car in Thessalon. He walked slowly down the street, changed in no slightest detail from the day he had last seen it, except that the usual group of loafers was absent from the hotel steps. Men he had known since boyhood passed him with no hint of recognition. Standing in front of his insurance office old Sam Dandy nodded, as he would have nodded to any stranger. Jack Bridger, a classmate through four years of high school, stood in the doorway of the hardware store in which he was now a partner. Stan paused, hardly able to suppress a smile.

"How far do you call it to the Soo?" he asked.

"Fifty-three miles, by road."

"Is there a train tonight?"

"Nope. Bus in the morning, and the local about noon. Going to the Soo?"

"Yeah. Going up to enlist."

"Good. I'd enlist, too, if I wasn't married. The way things look now, though, we might all be in it before this war's over. I'm ready whenever they need me. About all the young fellows are in it already. A lot of 'em have gone across. One lad from here's been killed. Young Jim Cavendish—swell kid—his dad runs the drug store, next door."

"What!" the word exploded from Stan's lips like a pistol shot. The other eyed him in surprise, and Stan suddenly realized his mistake. "Hadn't heard about it," he hastened to say. "Been back in the bush. Used to work in the sawmill at Blind River. I've seen him play hockey with the Thessalon team."

Bridger nodded. "Yes—it's too damn bad. Shot down over England. He was flying with the R.A.F."

A car with an Indiana license drew up to the curb and a man stepped out. "Got any minnie traps?" he asked.

Bridger nodded, and as he turned to follow the customer into the store he pointed across the street. "If you want to get to the Soo tonight just hang around the filling station and the chances are you'll get a ride."

Stan walked slowly down the street to-

ward the lake. As he passed the drug store he glanced in. The elder Cavendish stood behind the counter serving a customer. Just as usual, Stan thought. But—Jim—dead. He remembered Jim Cavendish well. As Jack Bridger had said—a swell kid. Everybody that knew him liked him—and now he was dead. And back there in the drug store his dad was serving customers as usual—he was carrying on. But—it wasn't as usual—with Jim lying in a grave somewhere in England—it would never be as usual again—it only looked that way.

HE CAME to the end of the street and walked on over the bare, glacier-gored rocks to the shore of the lake. The wooded islands stood out startlingly clear in the rays of the setting sun, and far across the blue water he could see black smudges that was smoke from the freighters. Gulls drifted lazily overhead, and a flock of fish ducks swam past, diving for minnows.

Realization dawned upon Stan, as he stood there gazing out across the water, that the death of Jim Cavendish had brought the war closer. He knew, of course, that in all wars men were killed. In the last war thousands—millions of them. But even though he was on his way to enlist in the war, there had been up to this moment something vague and impersonal about the whole thing. But now the war seemed terribly real. It had reached right here into Thessalon and killed Jim Cavendish. An intense rage gripped him. An anger altogether different from the cold resentment he had always unconsciously felt against the Germans for killing his father. Or the anger that had surged up within him when Pierre Bovee had told him of the rape of Poland. He had never known his father. Had never known Poland, except from the lips of his grandfather. But Jim Cavendish he had known.

"Damn the Germans!" he rasped aloud. "When I get over there I'll settle that score."

Then he turned and walked back into the town. Phil Billips sat at a desk in the little office of the filling station that he operated as a sideline to his resort on Basswood Lake, ten miles from town. He looked up as Stan darkened the doorway, glanced past him and saw that there was no car at the pumps.

"Something you wanted?" he asked abruptly.

Stan's lips behind his heavy beard smiled. Here was a man he could trust. "I've come to pay my bill," he said.

Billips eyed him with a frown in which was no hint of recognition. "Who the hell are you? And what do you owe me for?"

"For a canoe, an axe, a three hundred rifle, a sleeping bag, and a bunch of grub."

"Well—! Stan Klaska—what are you doing here?"

"Heading for the Soo to enlist, if I can catch a ride."

The other glanced past him. "Here comes Aubrey. I sent him to the post office. I've got the Olds out back, slip through and get in. I'll run you to the Soo. Be out there in a minute as quick as I look at the mail."

A few minutes later he slipped into the driver's seat, stepped on the starter, and when the motor took hold, threw her into gear and roared out of town. "Where the hell you been?" he demanded as the car thundered across the bridge.

"Back in the bush." Stan gave a brief account of his year in the bush.

"Slim Taylor was through here last fall when he went to enlist, and he claimed you hopped a freight at his place and hit out for the States," Billips said. "Jimmie McVane was in the hospital for a couple of weeks and carried his arm in a sling for a month longer. He swears he'll get you yet, Stan. He don't bear you any grudge. Claims there's damn few men would do what you did—taking him clear back to the road, after you'd crippled him there on Minnichenaqua. But Jimmie's a policeman, Stan—right down to his toes—and

he swears he'll bring you in for knifing that damn frog-eater."

"I didn't kill Joe Bedore, Phil. I didn't know he was dead 'til Dunc McMillan and Reid told me, the next day."

"Whether you killed him or not, you don't need to worry till the war's over. Jimmie McVane enlisted last winter. He was down in some camp near Toronto, last I heard. Prob'ly across by this time. His brother Jack's over there, too—doing a damn swell job of flying, according to the papers. I saw just yesterday where he'd brought down his thirteenth plane."

Stan nodded. "Yeah, I heard about it in Blind River. It's sure hell about Jim Cavendish. I just now heard about that."

Billips nodded. "Yeah, they got him—the dirty huns. Hell, I wish I was ten years younger! Now Bucky's talking about going. Damn fool kid," he added, a touch of pride in his voice. "Soon as he heard about Jim, nothing would do but he must go. He's got guts all right. But he'll have to wait a year or so. They don't take 'em that young. Grace and I aren't saying a word—but—Stan—I saw Cavendish the day he got the telegram about Jim."

"Do you think the Americans will come in, Phil?" Stan asked.

"By God, they better come in! We're sunk if they don't—and so are they."

THEY roared through Desbarets, swerved to miss a cow, throwing up a geyser of dust and gravel, narrowly missed the bridge rail, and roared on.

"It's Bucky that'll be getting a telegram about you, if you don't look out," Stan said, when his heart had receded from his throat.

"Why the hell don't they keep their damn cows off the road if they don't want 'em killed?" Billips replied. "I've got to get back to Thessalon—promised Grace and Bucky I'd take 'em to the picture show."

"How much do I owe you, Phil—for that stuff?"

"Do you want me to throw you out on your head?" Billips demanded. "At that, I wish you'd brought the old three hundred along just to see if it's as good on Germans as it is on bucks and bears. But they tell me the Canadian P 14's a honey. God, I'd like to get a peek at one of them huns through the sights!"

"That's what I want," Stan said. "I'm going to keep count of 'em—for Jim Cavendish."

On Queen Street Billips drew up to the curb. "Well, here you are, Stan. Better get that brush mowed off your face before you hit the recruiting station. You look like someone's granddad."

"I'll wait till morning," Stan grinned. "I might meet someone I know."

"That's right." Billips thrust out his hand. "So long, Stan. And good luck."

Stan sought a hotel, and remembering the registration card in his pocket, registered under the name of Nels Larsen. He ate an early breakfast, next morning, and walked directly to a barber shop near the recruiting station. The barber got busy with scissors and razor and a half hour later as he stared into the mirror, a smile twisted the corners of his mouth.

"Some difference, eh?" the barber said.

Stan nodded, thoughtfully. "Yeah," he agreed, "some difference." A soldier carrying a rifle was pacing slowly up and down before the recruiting station. Stan entered. A soldier with sergeant's stripes on his sleeves was seated behind a table. Across the room two others were talking to a young man who looked like a prospective recruit, while at a desk in the rear, another was busy filling out some kind of report.

Stan crossed the floor and paused before the table. The sergeant looked up. Then, for a long moment their glances held. Stan was looking squarely into the steel gray eyes of Jimmie McVane!

(*To Be Concluded in the Next* SHORT STORIES)

Something Seemed Lacking in the Christmas Spirit of Ocotillo City

RED PLAYS SANTA

By GENE VAN

Author of the Red Harris Stories

"Jingle Bells! Jingle bells!
Jingle all the way!
Oh, what fun it is to ride
In a one-horse open sleigh!"

THE heavy beating of rain on the roof made the music as Red Harris started another verse, but Little Pardner's voice stopped him, as the youngster asked:

"What's jingle bells, Red?"

"Oh, they're bells that are fastened on sleighs, and as yuh ride across the snow, they ring out different tunes," replied Red. "It's too darn bad we don't have snow down here for Christmas."

"Don't it ever snow down here?"

Red shook his head. "It never has—but forget about snow, an' get ready," he said as he got up off the bed and looked at himself in the mirror over the crude dresser. "Gee, I can hardly wait to get out in the livin' room with all the people."

"Will Santa be there?"

"Oh, it's a little early for him," replied Red as he went to the door and opened it a little and peeked out into the highly decorated living room. "Hurry up, everyone's here."

"I'm ready," said Little Pardner as he slipped into his blue coat. "Do I look all right, Red?"

"Yuh sure do," grinned Red. "Come on." At the door Red stopped the youngster. "Close your eyes for a minute."

Little Pardner placed his hands over his eyes, then Red opened the door. Everyone in the room was watching for their appearance, and they dropped into silence. Red led Little Pardner into the room and then closed the door behind him, and said:

"All right, open yore eyes."

Little Pardner's eyes were wide as he glanced wildly about the room. All their many friends were gathered to celebrate Christmas. Sheriff Spike Haslam had done himself proud in his decorations of the room.

In the further corner stood a large Christmas tree, fully decorated, and beneath it were many presents. Little Pardner took it all in, then he walked over to the tree, ignoring the guests. His eyes were wide with excitement. He stopped before the tree and glanced about.

"Where's Santa?" he asked, a catch in his voice.

"He'll be here shortly," replied Haslam as he winked at Peter Falls, who was standing next to him.

"Who's going to be Santa?" asked Falls in a whisper.

"Geography," replied the sheriff. "He had to take it when Ed Norton refused. Ed thought Christmas and Santa was a lot of bunk, and he told me so in not uncertain terms.

"He's a queer fellow," sighed Falls, "but, he's reliable."

Just then Little Pardner came over to the two men. "Are yuh sure Santa knows where we live?" he asked.

Haslam nodded. "I mailed your letter to him, so he knows," he replied. "You'd better go around an' see everyone."

"Come on, Little Pardner," said Red as he took the youngster by the hand and they moved over to where the people were seated about the tree. There was Mrs. Ryan, Jane Ryan, Art Ryan, and Buck Ryan seated on the couch. In a chair next to the couch was Mrs. McMann, while standing at her side was Larry McMann. Across from them sat Doc and Mrs. Bishop, Henry McColl, and Andy Adams. When they completed the rounds, Little Pardner turned to the sheriff.

"Where's Geography an' Jeep?" he asked.

"Geography will be here pretty soon," replied Haslam. "Jeep has to work, so he won't be able to come."

Red took Little Pardner by the hand and they went over to the tree where they sat down on the floor. Red Harris was sixteen years of age. His build was slight, but his mentality made up for it. His face was lean, tanned, and freckled, with a straight nose, small blue eyes and a wide mouth. His flaming red hair was combed, but a natural wave caused it to fluff up. Red was dressed in a gray pin-striped suit, with a white shirt and blue tie. He wore black oxfords on his feet.

Little Pardner's moon-like face beamed as he looked at all the presents. He was four years old, just the age to really enjoy Christmas. He was short and stocky. His pug nose was the recipient of a violent rubbing as his large blue eyes wandered from package to package. His blond hair was plastered down, but several stray strands managed to stick up. The youngster was wearing a blue suit, a white shirt, and a blue tie. He wore oxfords on his small feet.

Red and Little Pardner were always together, in and out of trouble. Red drifted into Ocotillo City an orphan, and Sheriff Spike Haslam adopted him and gave him a home. In return, Red took charge of Little Pardner, a job that kept him very busy.

Just then a sound on the front porch caused everyone to look at the front door. Little Pardner's eyes lighted up as he hurried forward.

"It's Santa," he said as he grabbed the doorknob and swung the door wide open. As he looked out on the porch, the light died in his eyes.

Standing on the porch, weaving back and forth, was Jeep Carter, the stage driver. His pinched face was streaked with blood, mud, rain. His clothes were a sight; torn and covered with mud and blood. He staggered into the room, where Haslam and Falls grabbed him and eased him into a chair.

"My God, what's happened?" gasped Falls.

"The—the—safe—" muttered Jeep. "San—san—Santa came. He—he hit me. The—the—gold's—gone!"

Falls turned and looked at Haslam, who turned and hurried into his bedroom, where he secured his gun and holster. He returned to the living room, fastening his belt about his waist. He stopped beside the chair, where Doc Bishop was examining Jeep Carter.

"Take care of him, Doc," he said. "We've got work ahead of us."

At the doorway, Red stopped Haslam. "What about Geography?" he asked. "He was supposed to be Santa."

"We'll find out," replied Haslam. "Come on."

Red grabbed his flat crown Stetson sombrero and a slicker off the rack near the door, then he followed Haslam, Falls, and Buck Ryan out of the house. They splashed their way down the street, through mud and water until they reached the stage office. The door was partly open, and the oil lamp was still burning.

"Red!" snapped the sheriff as he stopped in the doorway, allowing Falls and Buck to slip past him. "Go to the office an' see if Geography's there."

Red pulled the slicker tight about his shoulders and went back out into the rain. He hurried down the walk to the sheriff's office. He tried the door, and found it unlocked, so he shoved it open and stepped inside out of the beating rain.

"Geography!" called Red. "Geography, where are yuh?"

When there was no reply, Red secured a match from his coat pocket and lighted it, then he moved over to the oil lamp on the sheriff's desk and lighted it. The room was empty. Red moved about the place. On Geography's cot, he found an empty cardboard box. Red knew that the Santa Claus suit had come in it. There was no sign of the deputy nor the costume in the office, so Red went out, leaving the lamp burning. He hurried back to the stage office where he reported to the sheriff.

"That's funny," grunted Haslam. Geography was to be at the house at nine, an' we didn't pass him on the way down here. Where could he be? And the suit was gone, eh?"

Red nodded. "He didn't lock the office door, either," he added. "That looks mighty funny to me, Sheriff."

"It's not so funny," snapped Peter Falls as he stopped beside the sheriff. "I had seven thousand in gold stored in that safe, and it's gone! You've got to catch the robber, Sheriff. I can't afford to always be on the losin' end."

"You've always gotten yore gold back," said Red, "and the sheriff will do it again."

"I hope to," sighed Haslam as he moved about the small room.

RED leaned against the door, as he removed his sombrero and let the water run off the brim. Things were moving too fast for him. Little did Red think something would happen on Christmas Eve. Everyone had his mind set on the holiday spirit. It was hard for Red to get the spirit out of his mind and to get down to business. Who would do such a thing? What happened to Geography? While he thought the situation over, Red's eyes wandered about the room.

Down the center of the floor were muddy tracks, caused first by the robber, then by the three men as they examined things. Suddenly Red's eyes widened as he shoved away from the door and moved about halfway down the room toward the empty open safe. He knelt down and picked up something. As he straightened up, Haslam stopped beside him.

"What's that?" he asked.

Red looked at it, then handed it to the sheriff. It was an old worn boot heel.

"Anyone could have lost that heel in here," said Haslam.

"Mebbe," grunted Red, "an' mebbe it was the robber or Jeep Carter."

They all examined their boots, but none of them had lost a heel. The sheriff handed the worn heel back to Red, who slipped it into his slicker pocket.

"We'll check on Jeep's boots as soon as we go home," he said as he walked to the doorway. "There isn't a thing we can do here, is there, Sheriff?"

"I'm afraid everythin's been done here, said Haslam. "Let's go to the office an' take a look around."

"I'm goin' to stay here," said Buck as he dropped into a chair and removed his sombrero. "This place needs cleanin' up."

"I'll stay here, too, but I'm not goin' to clean up," said Falls.

Red fastened his slicker, placed his sombrero on his head, and followed the sheriff out into the heavy, beating, driving rain.

"Yuh don't suppose somethin's happened to Geography, do yuh?" asked Red Harris as soon as they closed the office door.

"I don't know," replied Haslam as he moved about the room. He looked at the empty cardboard box, then in the back room and the washroom, but there was no sign of the deputy nor his clothes. "He was goin' to change at the house," added Haslam, "so why would he take his costume out of the box down here? The box would protect it from the rain."

"It don't make sense," muttered Red as he sat down on the corner of the desk and looked at the puzzled sheriff. "Somethin' must have happened to Geography."

Haslam shoved his sombrero back on his head, causing the water to run from the brim and down his back. "What a night to pull anythin'," he grunted as he sat down.

JUST then there was a heavy rumble which nearly lifted the small office off its foundation. They looked at each other. Haslam shook his head and leaned back in his chair.

"Thunder," he said.

"Must have been mighty close," said Red as he slid off the desk and walked to the door. He opened the door and looked out on the main street of Ocotillo City. The heavy rain nearly blotted out the light that came from the oil lamps in the Fill 'Em Up Saloon across from the office. Red stepped out on the boardwalk and wandered along the front of the building to the alley where he paused.

Something had attracted Red's attention down the dark alley. He was unable to tell just what it was. Curiosity got the best of him, so he started down the alley to investigate. After all of the trouble, Red couldn't afford to let anything slip by.

Wham! Wham! Two bullets whistled close to the boy's head, causing him to fall in against the wall of the bank for protection. He waited a moment, then he started down the alley, when a voice from behind him called:

"What's the matter?"

Red turned to see Sheriff Haslam coming around the corner, a lantern in his left hand, his gun in his right.

"Watch out!" shouted Red as he leaned against the bank wall and waited for the sheriff.

"What's the matter?" asked the puzzled officer. "Didn't I hear two shots?"

"Someone shot at me from the rear of the bank," explained Red.

"Let's take a look," said Haslam as he started down the alley, the lantern swinging back and forth at his left side. At the corner of the bank they paused and then glanced about. The lantern light didn't throw its beam very far, and they were unable to see anything. Red turned and looked at the rear of the bank.

"Sheriff!" he gasped. "Look, the bank door's open!"

They moved over to the door. Haslam held the lantern shoulder high as they looked at the partly opened rear door of the bank. Haslam moved up the steps and pulled the door open, then he stepped inside, his gun ready for action, but the place was empty. Red moved in beside

the sheriff as they looked about the room.

"Let's take a look in the main office," said Haslam as he crossed the rear room. Slowly he opened the door and looked into the main room of the bank. Everything was still as they opened the door and stepped into the room.

"Look!" said Red. "The vault's wide open!"

They moved over and inspected the vault. It was cleaned out. Red whistled softly and looked up into the hard features of the sheriff.

"What next?" queried Red as he shook his head. "Now I know why I was shot at. He musta just came out of the bank."

"And that wasn't thunder," added Haslam as he inspected the door of the vault. "That was dynamite."

They moved over to the counters, where they found all the money drawers pulled open and dumped on the floor. Haslam set his lantern on the counter and sighed.

"Better fetch McColl, Red," he said. "This is one Christmas Eve we won't forget for a long time."

"Gosh, an' I put my money in the bank," sighed Red. "Gee, I'm broke again." He turned and hurried out of the bank. He ran, splashing mud all over his new gray suit. By the time he arrived at the house, he was a mess. As he opened the door, Little Partner jumped at him and grabbed him by the arm.

"Where's Santa?" he demanded.

"I wished I knew," replied Red as he told the people of all the trouble that had struck Ocotillo City. They were dumbfounded. Henry McColl grabbed his coat and hat and hurried out of the house. Red moved over to the couch where Jeep Carter was propped up. He looked up at Red.

"Was it Santa?" he asked weakly.

"I dunno," replied Red. "I seen him, but it was too dark to tell."

"It wasn't Santa," protested Little Pardner. "He's a good man."

Larry McMann and Andy Adams offered their services, but Red said that the sheriff was getting along all right. The women decided to go ahead with the Christmas party so that Little Pardner would be happy. Red left the house while the women were explaining to the youngster that Santa Claus wouldn't be able to visit them, but that he would get his presents.

RED stopped on the front porch and quickly removed his black oxfords and socks. He rubbed his pinched feet, then with a sigh, he dashed down the steps and toward town. He stopped by the stage office and told Buck Ryan and Peter Falls about the bank robbery. They closed the stage office and followed Red down to the bank where they found Haslam and Henry McColl going over the losses.

"They cleaned me out!" wailed McColl when he saw Ryan and Falls. "They didn't leave a red cent. This is terrible! It'll close the bank and break me."

"It broke me," sighed Red.

"One thing, my gold was insured when I placed it in the safe," grunted Falls, "but I still want it back."

"Sheriff," said McColl, "you've got to do something. You've got to stop this trouble—right now!"

Haslam shook his head. "I can't fight the dark, you know that," he said. "I've got to have somethin' to go on. As yet we haven't anythin', except that whoever pulled the jobs knew that we'd all be busy, so he picked a good night."

"What about Geography?" asked Falls. "Where is he? He has the Santa costume, hasn't he?"

"I don't know," replied Haslam. "He's

missin', an' so is the costume. We've got to find Geography, then we might know somethin'."

"Let's look for him," suggested Red as he moved to the door. "We can't do a thing standin' here. We've got to look around."

"Red's right," nodded Haslam. "All talk can't clear up this mess." The sheriff followed Red, who picked up the lantern. They went out the rear door and stopped at the corner of the building.

"Now where to, Red?" called Haslam so that Red could hear him above the rain and wind.

"Let's look up an' down the alley," shouted the boy as he started down the alley that led behind the buildings. They splashed along in the mud until they came to the side street at the end of the alley. Haslam wanted to go down to the house, but Red insisted upon retracing their steps down the alley. Haslam finally gave in.

They were nearly to the bank when Red stopped the sheriff and pointed to his private stable. The stable door was wide open. They moved inside out of the rain. Red grabbed Haslam by the arm.

"Listen!" he snapped. "What's that?"

They stood still. The beating of the rain on the shingle roof was loud; but they could hear someone moaning. Haslam moved forward toward the manger. He stopped at the edge as Red came in beside him with the lantern.

Stuffed down in the manger was Geography Jones, tied tightly. He blinked up at the light. His face was streaked with blood, and his shirt was torn. There was a dirty gag in his mouth. Haslam lifted Geography out of the manger and removed the gag and ropes.

"What happened?" asked Haslam.

"Tha—that—that's what I—I want to know," gasped the deputy as he rubbed his arms and legs. "That manger is sure small."

"Didja see who got yuh?" asked Red eagerly.

Geography shook his head as he felt of the deep gash on his forehead. "I didn't see anyone," he replied. "I was ready to leave for the house when someone knocked on the door. I went there, but no one was around. As I stepped outside, somethin' hit me. That's all I know."

"How's the head feel?" asked Haslam.

"Kinda big," sighed the deputy. "Ever since I came to, I've been layin' there thinkin' of Little Pardner an' his party."

"He's thought plenty, too," grinned Red.

HASLAM helped the deputy out of the stable while Red fastened the stable door shut, then he followed them up the alley to the office, where Geography sank down on the cot. He eyed the empty cardboard box. Haslam explained to Geography about the hold-ups while Red went to the bank to tell the men about Geography.

"This is hell!" snorted Geography as he let the sheriff wash the gash and bandage it. "So someone stole Santa's suit an' is raisin' hell in it, eh?"

"Yeah," nodded Haslam, "but that ain't all. Falls and McColl are raisin' their special hell, too. So far there isn't a thing to go on, but we've got to do somethin' before they get all the people up in arms. Those two can do it very easily."

"Lie if we have to," said the deputy. "A white lie might give us the time we need."

Just then the door opened and Red entered with McColl, Falls, and Buck Ryan. They were full of questions, but the sheriff waved them away from Geography.

"He knows nothin'—nothin' that I can tell you right now," said Haslam with a slight smile.

The men exchanged looks, wondering if the sheriff knew something of importance. They accepted his word, without any more comment.

"What can we do?" asked Falls.

"The best thing for you to do is to return to the party," replied Haslam. "I'm

sure things will turn out all right. I'll see that Geography is comfortable, then I'll follow."

"Can I help yuh, Sheriff?" asked Red.

"I don't need any help," replied Haslam. "You go with the rest of the men."

Red turned and opened the door. As he stepped out on the walk, he bumped into a man, who shoved Red ahead of him into the office. He threw back his coat, which covered his head. It was one of the bartenders from the Fill 'Em Up Saloon.

"Sheriff," he said as he faced Haslam, "I'm sure glad I found you down here. We need you over in the saloon."

"What's the matter?" asked Haslam.

"It's Ed Norton," replied the bartender. "He's drunk as they make 'em, and he claims that he met and talked with Santa Claus on his way to the saloon. He won't be still. He even wants to climb up on the bar and give a speech. I can't control him, and on a night like this, I don't want to have to throw him out in the street."

"I'll talk with him," snapped Haslam as he glanced at the men in the room. "So he met Santa, did he? This might prove interestin'."

GEOGRAPHY got up off the cot, put on his slicker, cocked his sombrero on one side of his head to avoid the gash, and followed them as they splashed their way across the street to the Fill 'Em Up Saloon. They found Ed Norton and another man arguing at the bar. The place was nearly empty, except for three men engaged in a poker game at the rear of the room.

Ed Norton turned and looked owl-eyed at the men as they walked up to the bar. He shook his head and rubbed his turned-up nose.

"Well, well," he said thickly. "Whatsha want? Did—did yuh lose shomethin', Sheriffie?"

"Mebbe," replied Haslam as he looked over at the men next to Norton. He was about medium size, dressed in a misfit blue suit. His eyes were nearly closed as he looked up from the bar. "Nice way you an' Chuck are celebratin'."

"Gotta get drunk," stated Chuck Putnam as he lifted his glass and downed his drink. "It's the only way."

Haslam turned to Norton. "What's this I heard about you talkin' with Santa?"

"There's no Shanta," grunted Norton as he leaned over the bar. "I—I'm drunk. I shaw him, but—but, oh, I was sheein', things."

"Are yuh sure of that?" asked Haslam, "I heard Santa was runnin' about town."

Norton raised his eyebrows and studied the sheriff. "Are you drunk, too?" he asked thickly.

"I am not," snapped the disgusted officer. "If you saw him, what did he look like?"

"Like Shanta, of course," grunted Norton.

"I think you're both drunk," said Chuck Putnam as he moved down the bar.

Haslam glanced at the men with him, then turned back to Norton. "I think you've had enough. You'd better get to bed," he said.

"Go home?" queried Norton, as he pulled back from the sheriff. "I haven't had a chance to get a drink yet."

Haslam looked across at the bartender, who nodded his head. "That's right, Sheriff," he said. "He was pickled when he came in here. I sold him two bottles earlier this evening."

"I want more," protested Norton.

"You've had enough, Norton," said Haslam as he took the man by the right arm. "Come on, yo're goin' to bed."

Norton looked at the other men as they moved about him. "All of yuh go-go-goin' to take me home?" he asked thickly. "My, my, but I'm im-im-important."

Haslam and Buck Ryan assisted Norton out of the saloon while Geography, McColl, and Red followed. They took him down the street to his house. There was several times when Norton nearly fell on his face, but the two men managed to get

him home safely. They placed Ed Norton on his bunk, threw a blanket over him, and left him to sleep it off.

At the Haslam house, the party was in full swing. The women were doing their best to make it a big night for Little Pardner. He was seated on the floor in front of the trees, playing with his presents. After Haslam and the others returned, the party soon broke up and everyone hurried home.

RED HARRIS slipped in between his covers and laid his head back on his pillow. His mind was in a whirl. Things were too balled up for him to fall right asleep. The Christmas excitement had been forced into the background as a result of the robberies. Red wondered who was behind this trouble. He closed his eyes and relaxed.

Red sighed as he fell back on his pillow. He knew that he had gained one important point, but he also knew that one wasn't enough to solve all this trouble. If he could only find the Santa Claus costume. Red closed his eyes, and he was soon sound asleep.

"Merry Christmas!" shouted a voice, which awoke Red out of a sound sleep. He slowly opened his eyes. Just then something landed on top of Red, which nearly knocked the wind out of him. It was Little Pardner.

"Merry Christmas, Red," grinned the youngster as he kissed Red.

"Yeah, yeah," nodded Red. "Merry Christmas, Little Pardner."

"You'd better get up, Red," said the youngster. "Daddy's gone already."

"Gone?" queried Red. "Why, what time is it?" He turned and looked at the battered old alarm clock that was on the dresser. It was nine o'clock. "Gosh, why didn't he wake me up?"

"He said to let yuh sleep, but I want yuh to look at yore presents," replied the youngster. "You never opened them last night."

"Doggone it, that's right," grunted Red as he threw back the covers and climbed out of bed. "I plumb forgot all about it. Come on."

Little Pardner climbed off the bed and followed Red into the living room. He went through the presents while Little Pardner sat on the floor and watched, a sparkle in his blue eyes.

Just then the front door opened and Haslam entered. Red jumped to his feet and went over to the officer.

"Merry Christmas, Sheriff," he said.

"Same to you, Red," said the sheriff as he shook Red's outstretched hand. "I see yore checkin' to see if Old Santa missed yuh."

"He didn't," grinned Red, "but what about Santa? Didja find out anythin' at all?"

HASLAM shook his head as he sat down on the couch. "Not a thing," he replied. "Geography and Jeep can't shed any light at all. I tried to question them, but it was useless. They didn't see much. Jeep did see the Santa costume, but that's all."

"What about Ed Norton?" asked Red. "Mebbe if he's sober he could help yuh."

"I went past his place, but he's still asleep," said Haslam. "This trouble certainly has cast a gloom over Christmas. One thing, I'm glad it's stopped raining. That's the only bright thing."

"Lottsa nice presents," remarked Little Pardner.

"Yes, but as long as somethin' like this hangs over our heads, presents don't mean very much," sighed the tired sheriff. "I've looked in every dump and fire to see if I could find any trace of the costume, but it's disappeared along with the man who wore it."

"I wished it had been lighted last night when he shot at me," grunted Red.

"You don't even know if he was the man dressed as Santa, do yuh, Red?"

"Well, no," replied Red, "but why would he shoot at me if he wasn't. He

must have been connected with the trouble in some way."

"There might be more than one person," suggested Haslam. "One might have been at the rear of the bank as a lookout, and when he saw you, he fired to keep you back and give the other man enough time to clear out."

Red nodded. "Yes, it could be, but I don't think so. This fellow didn't come up the alley from the rear of the bank, or I'll lose my guess." Red sank down beside the sheriff on the couch. "Have yuh seen Falls or McColl yet this mornin'?"

"They were waitin' for me at the office," replied Haslam. "They can be my friends, but they sure are raisin' Holy Ned right now. Of course, I don't blame 'em one bit. I reckon I'd do the same thing under the same circumstances."

"Would I?" queried Little Pardner as he looked up from his toys.

"I'll bet yuh would," said Red.

A knock on the front door caused them to look at each other. The sheriff pointed at Red, and smiled. "You'd better get out of that nightshirt an' get dressed," he said as he got to his feet and started for the door.

Red leaped to his feet and hurried into his bedroom, but he kept the door partly open, and as he dressed, he looked out into the living room where the sheriff was ushering in Andy Adams.

"I decided to look into my business, Sheriff," Adams was saying as he sat down, "and I found my cash drawer broken and all my money gone. This is terrible for me."

Haslam nodded. "Whoever pulled this trouble, didn't overlook a single bet, did he?"

Andy Adams' bald head bobbed up and down. He shoved his glasses back off the end of his nose and squinted at Little Pardner, who was unconcerned.

"My, my, I wished I was a child again —no troubles, no worries," he said.

Just then Red came into the living room. He walked over to the couch where he spoke to Andy. The owner of the general store looked up at Red and shrugged his narrow shoulders.

"Merry Christmas, yeah," he said. "But when my money's gone, it isn't so merry."

"Did the thief leave any clues?" asked Red.

"Mud, groaned Andy. "Plenty of mud where he entered the rear window and walked in behind the counter. He didn't touch another thing, thank goodness."

"I'll take a look around," said Haslam as he picked up his hat. "Come on, Andy, we'll see what we can find out."

"I'm comin'," said Red as he grabbed his flat crown sombrero off the hat rack. "What about you, Little Pardner?"

"I'm stayin' here an' playin' with my toys," answered the youngster. "I won't go away."

RED laughed as he shut the door and followed the two men up the muddy street. They walked past the hotel, Fill 'Em Up Saloon, and a small store before they came to the General Store. Andy unlocked the front door and they entered. He pointed out the mud tracks, and the broken cash drawer.

"This makes it very bad for yuh, doesn't it?" asked Haslam.

Andy nodded. "Yes, but I had mind enough to take some of my money out of the drawer yesterday. I got it hidden at home—unless Mr. Santa went there after it." His eyes widened. He turned and raced out of the office.

"Poor fellow," sighed Red, as he moved about the room with the sheriff. They couldn't find a thing, so Haslem decided to go back to the office. He ordered Red to remain at the store and wait until Andy Adams returned. Red sat down on the top step of the wide front porch that ran across the front of the building. He watched Haslam cross the street and enter the sheriff's office.

"What next?" grunted Red as he leaned back against a porch post and watched what few people there were on the street. Everyone was celebrating Christmas at home.

Christmas! Red shook his head and sighed. He had planned so much for this day, and now everything had to be pushed into the background while they worked on the robberies that were terrorizing Ocotillo City.

"He didn't miss on anything," muttered Red as he went over each robbery, trying to find just one small item that would help him to build something. First it was Jeep Carter and the stage office, followed by Geography's disappearance. Then came the bank robbery, and today, Andy Adams' discovery of his smashed money drawer.

Red sighed deeply and closed his eyes. The events of the last few hours flashed through his mind. Somewhere, Red knew there must be a clue, but where, he wasn't sure.

Just then Andy Adams returned. He nodded to the bartender who moved up the street. Andy was all smiles as he stopped on the porch and looked down at Red.

"He didn't find it, by golly," he said proudly. "I really know how to hide money. Too bad I didn't clean out the drawer last night and hide it all."

"Well," sighed Red as he got to his feet, "as long as yuh have part of it, yo're better off than McColl and Falls. They really took a loss."

Adams shook his head. "I hope the sheriff does something," he said.

"He will," promised Red as he went down the steps and across the street to the sheriff's office where he found Haslam and Geography busy discussing the trouble. The deputy was sprawled on the cot, his head encased in white bandages. Both officers looked at Red and spoke. Red told the sheriff that Adams found his other money that he had hidden.

"I'm glad that wasn't gone," sighed Haslam. "Lucky for us that we don't have money in here."

"It sure is," grunted Geography, " 'cause I'll bet he'd a helped himself to it. That feller certainly picked a grand time when everyone was busy thinkin' about Santa and presents."

"I don't know just where to start," confessed Haslam. "My mind is goin' in circles."

"It is a problem," sighed Red. "Well, I'm goin' back to the house an' see how Little Pardner is gettin' along with all his new toys."

LITTLE PARDNER was busy showing off his new playthings to Blub and Fitt, his mongrel pup and tall range cat. The pets didn't seem the least bit interested, but Little Pardner wouldn't let them out of his sight. He turned and looked up at Red Harris as he entered the room.

"Hello, Red," he said with a broad grin. "Whatcha been doin'?"

"Nothin' much," replied Red as he sat

down on the couch. "How are the toys? Haven't broken any yet, have yuh?"

Little Pardner shook his head. "I been havin' a lot of fun, but Glub and Fitt don't like 'em. Didn't Santa bring them anythin', Red?"

"I don't think he did," grinned Red. "He missed the pets, but he took care of all the people."

"Everyone?"

"I sure hope so," sighed Red. "I don't know of anyone that he missed."

Little Pardner got to his feet. "Let's go out and see if Santa did miss anyone," suggested the youngster. "If he did, we oughta do somethin' to make 'em happy, Red."

"Golly, yo're right, Little Pardner," grinned Red as he got to his feet. "With all this excitement, I plumb forgot about goin' around an' checkin' on everyone." He followed the youngster to the front door. "Where shall we start?" he asked as he opened the door and they stepped out on the front porch.

"I dunno," replied Little Pardner.

They looked up and down the main street, undecided upon just where to start. Little Pardner stood on the porch and looked up at Red.

"Where shall we go first, Red?" he asked.

"I dunno," replied Red. "Supposin' we start at this end o' town. Ed Norton's house is the first."

"He's not a nice man, Red," said the youngster. "He don't believe in Santa Claus."

Red smiled. "He's all right," he said. "At Christmas we mustn't hold any grudges. Come on."

As they started down the walk, they met Chuck Putnam who was riding down the muddy road. He drew up his horse and waited for the two boys to reach the road.

"Did the sheriff find his Santa last night?" he asked.

Red shook his head. "He didn't have any luck," replied Red. "Did you see anyone dressed as Santa?"

Putnam's eyes narrowed and he shook his head. "I still think the sheriff was crazy," he snorted. "What would anyone be doin' dressed as Santa—an' why would he go to all that trouble to dress that way before he robbed the different places?"

Red shrugged his shoulders. "The sheriff wasn't crazy," he said. "The robber wore that costume and committed all the robberies last night."

"Well, whoever it was is probably a long ways away from here by now—because he's smart," said Putnam as he straightened in his saddle and started down the road. The two boys watched him for a minute, then they crossed the street and entered Norton's yard. Ed Norton's small shack seemed lonely as the two boys went up to the front door where Red knocked loudly. There was no response to the knock, so Red moved over to a window and looked inside.

Red heard the creaking sound of a door opening. He turned just in time to see Little Pardner disappear into the shack. Red left the window and went to the door where he looked inside. Little Pardner was walking about the empty room.

"Don'tcha know better'n to go into someone's house!" snapped Red.

"The door wasn't locked," replied the youngster.

Red looked around the room. There was no one about. He started to turn, but Little Pardner walked further into the room. Red shook his head as he started after the youngster.

"Where do yuh think yo're goin'?" demanded Red.

"To see if Santa was here," replied Little Pardner seriously.

"Well, hurry up," sighed Red as he leaned against the door and watched the youngster, who moved about the bunk, then around the stove. Suddenly he stopped and looked up at the ceiling.

"Santa was here, Red," he said.

"Santa was here?" queried Red as he left the door and moved in beside the youngster. "What do yuh mean, Little Pardner?"

"Look," pointed the youngster as he moved in beside the wood stove. "Santa lost some of his suit."

Red looked closely. There was a piece of red cloth lying on the floor between the

stove and a large wood box. Red knelt down and picked it up. One end was burned off. It was part of a sleeve.

"Did Santa come down the stove pipe?" queried Little Pardner as he looked at the small stove pipe that went up from the stove and out through a small hole in the wall.

"I don't think so," replied Red.

"Then how'd he get in here?"

"That's what I'd like to know," replied Red as he went over to the bunk and sat down. Red's mind was busy, trying to figure out the reason for the red sleeve beside the stove when he happened to look down at the bunk. There was something under the blanket. Red reached over and pulled back the blanket. Placed in the bunk were two unopened whiskey bottles.

Red whistled softly as he got to his feet. Little Pardner came over and looked at Red, wondering why he was whistling. Red shoved the piece of red cloth in his overall pocket.

"We've got to find the sheriff," he said. "He'd like to know about this."

He took Little Pardner by the hand and they started toward the door. Just as they reached the door, a man stepped into the doorway, blocking their passage. They stopped and looked up at the man. It was Ed Norton.

Red swallowed hard, then he tried to smile. "Merry Christmas, Mister Norton," he said.

"Merry Christmas, eh? What are you two snoopin' around here for?" demanded Norton. "How'd you get in here?"

"The door was unlocked," replied Little Pardner. "We just walked right in."

"Walked right in, eh?" grunted Norton as he glanced about the room. His eyes rested on the turned back blanket on the bunk, then he looked closely at Red. He saw a corner of the red sleeve sticking out of Red's pocket. Norton limped toward the two boys. They retreated several steps until Norton stopped.

"I think you've got more in yore mind than just comin' over here to wish me a Merry Christmas," snarled Norton. "What is it, Red?"

"It's too bad yuh didn't believe in Christmas, Mr. Norton," said Red. "You could have saved yourself a lot of bad luck."

"Bad luck, eh?" scowled Norton as he backed to the door and kicked it shut, then he turned and slipped a large bar into place, locking the door. He turned toward the boys, a crooked smile on his face. "Mebbe it's bad luck for you two, too."

"What do yuh mean?" queried Red. "We've got to go home." He took Little Pardner by the hand and started toward the door, but Norton blocked his path.

"Yo're stayin' right here, Red," he said, as he moved toward the two boys. Little Pardner slipped in behind Red, his eyes wide with fright. "Turn around, both of yuh!" he snapped.

The two boys obeyed. Norton watched them closely as he moved in behind Red and pulled the red cloth from Red's pocket. Red swallowed hard and glanced over his right shoulder at the man. His face was pale.

"Snoopin', eh?" grunted Norton as he eyed the cloth. He tossed it to one side. "You've done all the snoopin' yo're ever goin' to do, Red-head."

Red watched as Norton backed over to a small table next to the bunk. He opened the drawer and pulled out a large butcher knife. Red glanced down at Little Pardner. The youngster was shaking, and his face was a sickly white. Norton tested the blade of the knife on the ball of his thumb, then he closed the drawer and looked at the two boys, a mean glint in his eyes.

"Yo—yo—yo're not goin' to—" Red swallowed hard as cold perspiration appeared on his forehead.

"That's right, Red," snarled Norton as he moved toward them. "I believe in silent methods. No one will hear a sound, and I'll be miles away before anyone discovers yore two bodies."

"I—I'm frightened, Red," muttered Little Pardner—not without reason.

"So am I," confessed Red as he placed an arm about the youngster's shoulders. "Why do yuh have to kill us, Norton? We'll stay in here until yo're far away."

Norton laughed; the laugh of a maniac. "That's a smart one—leave yuh here!" he said. "You know too much already. I'm smart enough to fool the sheriff and all officers. They'll never catch me."

RED thought for a second, then said. That's what you think, Norton, but the sheriff knows that we're over here, an' if we don't come out pretty soon, he'll come after us. He said that you overacted your drunk last night; I heard him tell Geography this morning to watch your house and see what moves yuh made."

Norton's eyes narrowed as he studied Red. He wasn't sure if the boy was lying or not. Suddenly he turned and walked to a front window where he glanced outside. Red tried to take advantage of the move to get out of the shack, but Norton whirled from the window and stepped between the boys and the door.

"Yo're lyin'!" he snarled as he moved slowly toward them, the butcher knife held shoulder high. Red stepped in front of Little Pardner, shielding him from Norton. The man stopped.

"Get away from the kid!" he snapped.

"Don't you dare touch Little Pardner," said Red.

"So you're goin' to stop me, eh?" chuckled Norton. "Tryin' to be brave. Well, I'll take you first, then the little kid. It don't make no difference with me."

Norton lifted the knife as he stepped in close to Red. Red, without lost motion, kicked Norton in the shin, then he whirled about, shoving Little Pardner across the room toward the wall. The youngster landed on his hands and knees.

"Get the sheriff!" yelled Red as he ducked Norton's wild swing with the knife.

Norton snorted aloud, and charged at Red, who ducked wildly to one side, and Norton fell against the wood stove. Red glanced to see what Little Pardner was doing. The youngster was slowly getting to his feet. As he started toward the door, Norton shoved himself back from the stove and started after him. As he went past Red, the boy leaped and landed squarely upon Norton's shoulders.

Norton cursed and tried to throw Red off, but the boy clamped his right arm about Norton's neck, nearly cutting off his supply of air. With his left hand, Red battered at Norton's face. The man flung his arms frantically in the air, trying to bring the knife in contact with Red, but Red managed to duck each swipe, and in between moves, he battered Norton's face.

Little Pardner got to the door, but he had trouble in trying to lift the heavy bar. He stood on his tiptoes, and with all his strength, he pushed up on the bar until it slipped over the edge of the slot. Little Pardner then swung the door open and raced out of the shack, yelling for the sheriff.

"Atta boy, Little Pardner!" panted Red as he saw the youngster leave the house. Red dug his bare heels into Norton's ribs, and kicked for all he was worth, causing the man to cry with pain. Norton managed to get his right hand free, and he raised it high, with the knife gripped tightly. Red saw the move, and reached out with his left hand and encircled the arm, and brought all his extra weight and strength to bear on it.

Red pulled the arm close enough, then he stretched out his head and grabbed Norton's arm with his teeth. He managed to get a good hold, and he clamped down hard, causing Morton to howl with pain. He released the knife and it fell to the floor. In desperation, Norton whirled himself around and went to his knees, then he fell backward, causing Red to release his hold to protect himself. In a flash, Norton turned and grabbed at Red, but the

boy rolled away and scrambled to his feet.

Norton got to his feet and started after Red, who ducked around the table, trying to get to the open door. Norton tossed the table to one side and cornered Red. As he moved in, his hands reaching for Red, there was a sound in the doorway. Norton hesitated. In that second, Red ducked low and drove his body in against Norton's knees, knocking him to one side.

"Good boy, Red," said Sheriff Spike Haslam as he entered the shack.

NORTON, swearing, leaped to his feet and dove for the doorway, but the sheriff caught him, throwing him to the floor. Geography came through the doorway, handcuffs in hand. He quickly fastened them on the prisoner, then Haslam got to his feet. By this time Little Pardner, Peter Falls, Buck Ryan, and several others were in the room.

"Gee," panted Red as he climbed to his feet. "I—I didn't think yuh were ever comin'."

"We came as soon as Little Pardner told us," smiled the sheriff. "I was coming down to the house to get yuh. Ma Ryan's invited us up to their house for the big Christmas dinner."

"Gee," Red licked his lips. "I—I kinda worked up an appetite."

"What's this all about?" asked Geography as he jerked Norton to his feet.

"He's the Santa we were lookin' for," replied Red as he went over and picked up the piece of red cloth. "This is what Little Pardner found. Norton burned the red suit, but this piece failed to get into the stove. He faked the drunk last night. The two whiskey bottles are over in the bunk. He was smart, but he forgot to clean up—an' he forgot to fix the heel on his boot." He dug into his overalls pocket and brought out the heel he had found in the stage office. "This came off Norton's boot when he entered the stage office."

"I reckon Red didn't miss a single thing," grinned Haslam. "He did a regular house cleanin'."

"Where's the loot?" asked Falls.

"In my stable," replied the defeated man. "I put it in the manger."

"Golly, what a Christmas after all," smiled Falls.

"Norton was goin' to pull out tonight," said Red. "I reckon Little Pardner an' I kinder put a cramp in his plans."

"Yuh sure did," snorted Norton. "Well, anyway, the kid saved me from killin' anyone—an' that's somethin'."

"It saves yore neck, Norton," said Haslam, "so mebbe yuh'll believe in Santa Claus after this."

"Mebbe," sighed Norton.

"Red," said Falls, "I believe in Santa Claus after all."

"Yeah," nodded Haslam. "Even if Red had to play the part."

In the next issue

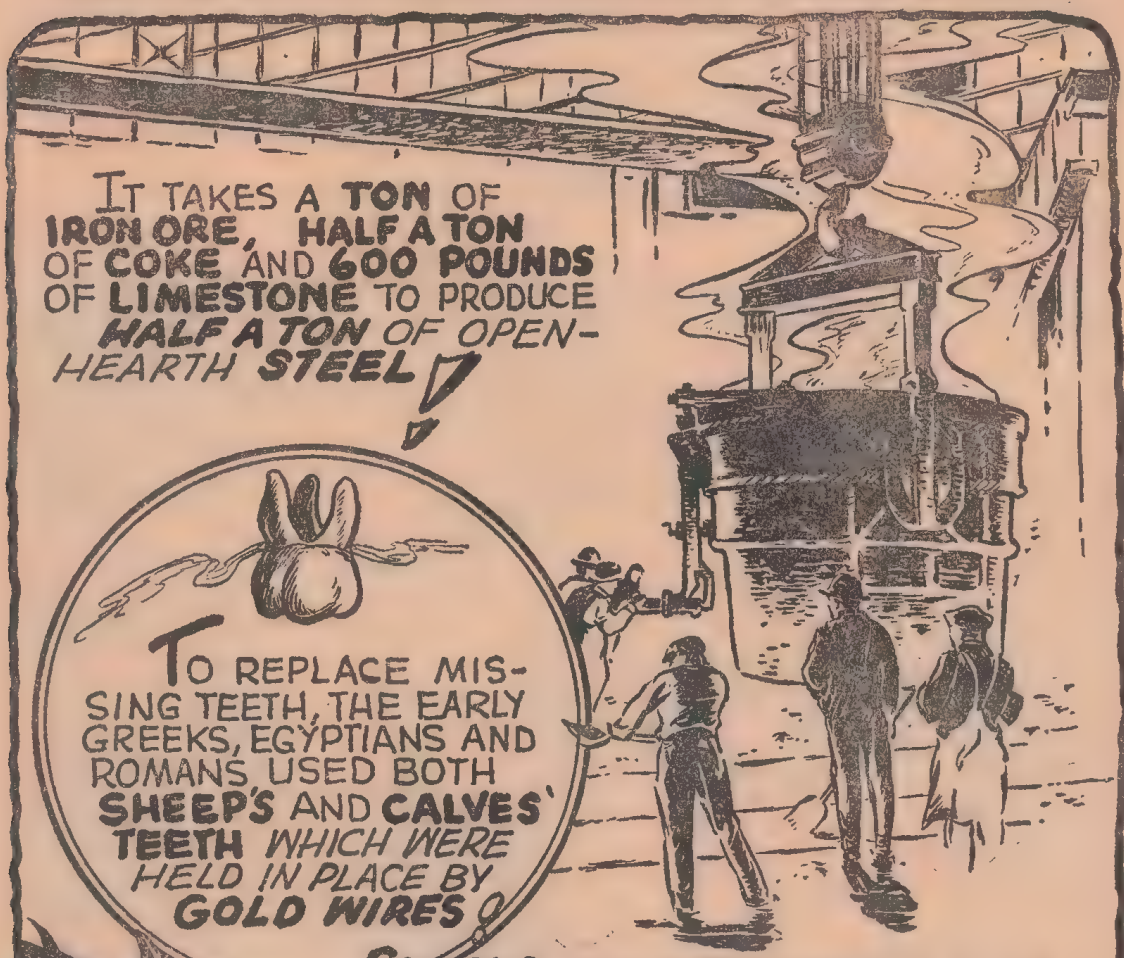
"No-Shirt McGee" gets a turkey dinner for Christmas; not bacon and beans beside the trail. . . .

"No-Shirt Santa Claus"—F. R. Pierce

Curioddities

BY Weill

IT TAKES A **TON** OF **IRON ORE**, **HALF A TON** OF **COKE** AND **600 POUNDS** OF **LIMESTONE** TO PRODUCE *HALF A TON* OF OPEN-HEARTH **STEEL**



TO REPLACE MISSING TEETH, THE EARLY GREEKS, EGYPTIANS AND ROMANS USED BOTH **SHEEP'S** AND **CALVES' TEETH** *WHICH WERE HELD IN PLACE BY* **GOLD WIRES**

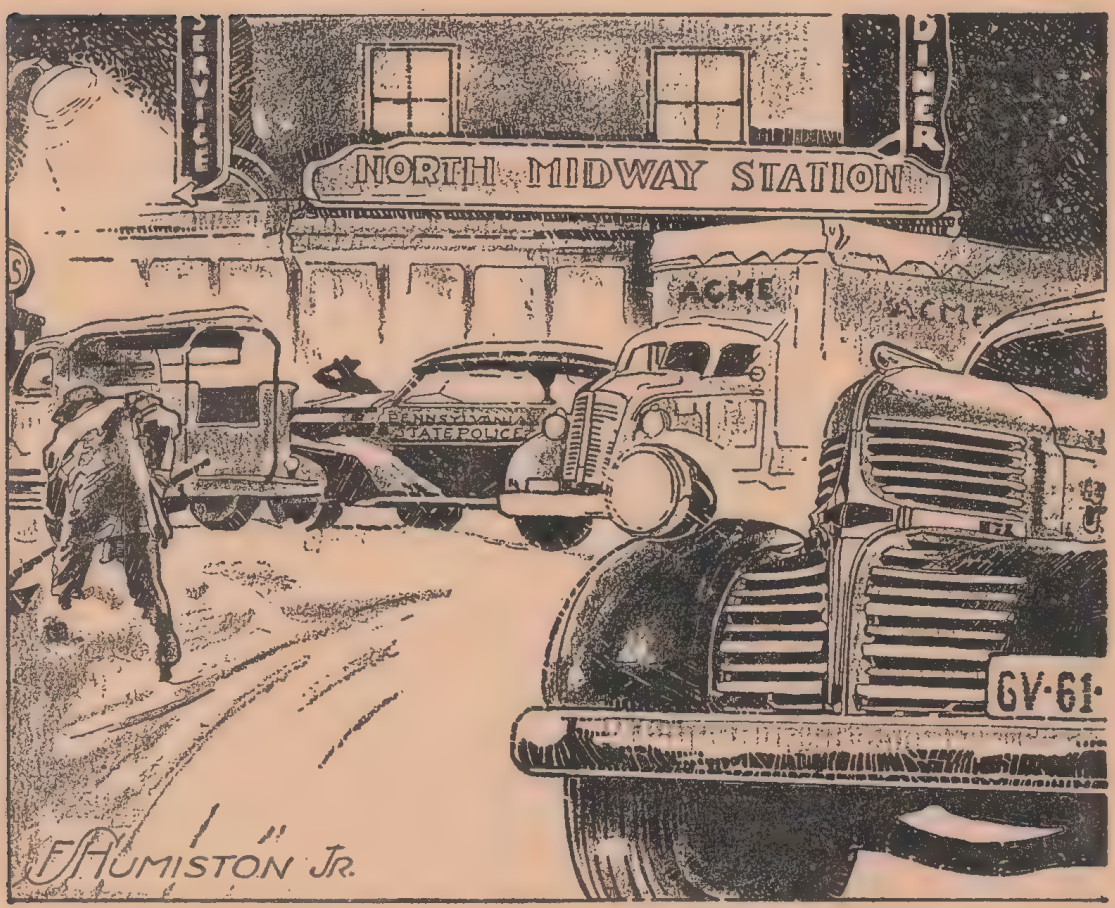
SHARKS ARE NOT FASTIDIOUS AS TO **DIET**— THEY WILL SWALLOW ANYTHING FROM TIN CANS TO FLESH-AND-BLOOD ANIMALS! IF THE NEWBORN YOUNG OF THE SHARK DON'T IMMEDIATELY LEAVE THE VICINITY OF THE MOTHER, THEY WON'T REMAIN ALIVE LONG, *FOR THE FEMALE PARENT DOES NOT LET A THING LIKE MOTHER LOVE INTERFERE WITH HER* **INSATIABLE APPETITE**

WHEN WAS THE FIRST CHRISTMAS CARD SENT? *See Curioddities next time.*

The World's Greatest Super-highway, the Pennsylvania Turnpike, Sees High Tension Drama Along Its Amazing Grades

DANGER IN THE NIGHT

By WILLIAM G. BOGART



SINCE midnight it had steadily been turning colder, until now, within the high cab of the truck-tractor unit, Johnny Rogers felt the chill November air penetrating through his leather windbreaker. But the cold was all right, and he kept whistling, like he oftentimes did throughout the lonely ten-hour nights, because he preferred not to use the heater.

Not for one single instant do you risk soothing drowsiness when you've got ten huge wheels thundering the Pennsylvania Turnpike beneath you and a 12-ton trailer loaded with cargo weaving and pounding behind the cab. At better than fifty miles an hour!

So Johnny whistled, and thought of Sue, and the deep, steady throb of the powerful Diesel motor was music in his ears. Sweet and lovely. Sue was sweet and lovely, too. Sue was his bride of a whole week. So he was a guy with responsibilities; he had to be careful.

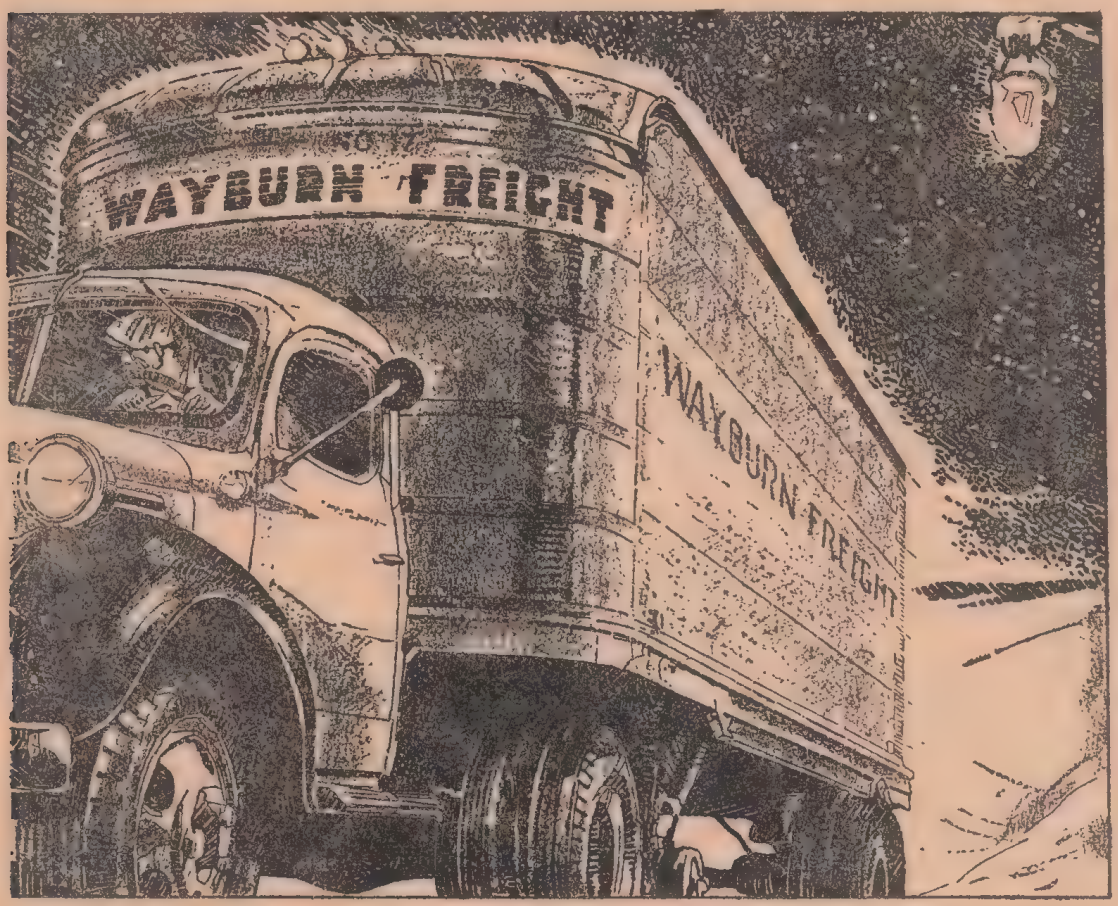
Take the night Dave Walsh had dozed off for a moment near Harrisburg on Route 11—well, it wasn't pleasant to think about the way Dave had cracked up. You remembered one important thing. Drowsiness is a truck jockey's deadliest enemy.

Johnny's sharp bright eyes watched the wide strip of Turnpike unfold ahead. For a straight, long mile the twin line of cat's-eye reflector markers caught his headlight beams and outlined his route, while far off,

It was pretty swell, the open road, being out here in the night, the mountains —unseen in the darkness—all around you.

Johnny wondered if it were going to snow.

Snow was all right, but rain and sleet and ice were something else again. A trailer job could behave like a conga dancer when a highway was sleet-frozen. And tomorrow night—tonight, really—he had a relay run back to Philly.



was the oncoming, sweeping curve. And less visible in the darkness, on the road driver's left, was the opposing one-way half of the world's greatest superhighway—the Pennsylvania Turnpike. A wide swath of turf separated the two express lanes. Occasionally, in the distance, a pair of tiny headlights would come into view, then swiftly rush closer, the car flashing past in the night. Or a truck, the friendly wheel-gripper wig-wagging his lights in greeting.

JOHNNY eased on the air for the long banked curve ahead. He hit the curve at precisely the right angle, then gunned the motor again. On the straightaway the huge reflector sign swept into view: "GAS STATION TWO MILES AHEAD." And less than two moments later a similar, warning sign:

"GAS STATION HALF MILE AHEAD." How well he knew this particular sign. Ahead, lights of the North Midway Station—halfway across the 160-mile Turn-

pike—were blinking a cheerful welcome in the overcast night.

North Midway was Johnny's coffee-and-anchor stop. It was more than this, a spot of heaven in the mountains, because—because Sue was there!

He started easing off on the gas, angling smoothly onto the deceleration lane that bordered the through-express highway. The lane formed a thousand-foot approach to North Midway. It was just an example of the way things had been built on this great highway. No cross traffic, no U-turns, no stop lights, and seventy miles an hour the speed limit. Streamlined!

He brought the massive red-painted tractor-and-trailer unit to a smooth stop in one of the wide cement parking lanes near the station, a quarry-stone structure of early Pennsylvania colonial architecture. One half of the building was the service station; the other half a Howard Johnson restaurant with its colorful lamplit windows and slanted Venetian blinds. Cheery.

Far across the road, on a slight knoll, stood the larger two-story station that was South Midway. Bright floodlights revealed the highway trucks of wildcats and gypsies drawn up beyond the building. There were sleeping quarters at South Midway; a road-jockey headed east could grab some shut-eye on his way into New York and the seaboard cities.

But not a relay driver like Johnny Rogers. Each alternate night he left Philadelphia at six o'clock, with close to three hundred miles of highway ahead of him until he pulled into Irwin—western terminus of the Turnpike—at four-thirty the following morning, where another Wayburn Freight relay driver took the unit over for the final lap to Chicago. Johnny's schedule called for eight hours' sleep in the small hotel in Irwin, then back to Philly tonight. A week more of this, and after that it would be the cosy little apartment that he and Sue were furnishing in Irwin, and Sue waiting there with breakfast ready for him and her eyes sleepy and wonderful.

Johnny snapped off the various switches of his riding lights, locked the cab behind him and swung down to the wide parking area. He was a tall, well-set-up young man with pleasant blue eyes and rough sandy hair, visible beneath a peaked driver's cap. Four years on the road had given him a tanned ruggedness. He saw a straight job and a semi-trailer unit of the Black Diamond Fleet parked nearby. Two drivers were bent down beneath the open hood of the straight job and from the truck's motor came an unholy, staccatic din. Frowning, Johnny moved that way.

"Head gasket?"

One of the drivers looked up. Johnny knew him slightly, though he was not a Wayburn driver. "Yeah," the man said dourly. Split wide open." Then he was smiling, speaking loudly above the noise of the motor. "How's the little woman?"

Johnny was grinning. "I'll tell you soon as I see her." He nodded toward the building. "I'll be right back. If there's something I can do—"

The big driver waved his hand. "Lou Ward's sending a new head gasket out from Irwin. We'll just have to hang around, kid. Thanks."

The other driver looked over his shoulder. There was grease on his face and he had a pug nose. His eyes were jolly. "I hear that was quite a wedding party they threw for you and Sue down in Irwin last week. But what happened to Blocky Edwards?"

"Blocky's all right," Johnny said.

"I heard he got into an argument with Lou Ward."

"It wasn't anything."

"Lou Ward's a good guy," said the pug-nosed driver. "But that wife of his. Her and her money! Blocky had better watch his job."

Johnny knew what he meant. He said, "Blocky's not interested in Lou's wife. He was just feeling high. Blocky's all right."

Johnny glanced at his watch. He had clipped an extra five minutes off his running time, and he wanted to spend those important minutes with Sue. He hurried toward the restaurant part of the building.

"Coffee and a hamburger," Johnny told the young man behind the counter. He looked around. "Where's Sue?"

"Sue's around, Johnny," said the counter man. "She was waiting for you."

There was a slim, dark man seated alone at the end of the counter. Three or four tourists were seated at the neat little window tables. The man at the counter kept looking at the truck driver, and Johnny had the impression there was something familiar about him.

"Sue was off early tonight," the counter man was saying. "I think she just ran down to the farm for a few minutes—"

BUT Johnny wasn't listening. What he was doing was moving quickly toward the slim and dainty girl with the nice large gray eyes who had entered through a doorway at the rear of the room. He was looking at this lovely child who was his wife, and his eyes were bright and eager, with some of his heart in them as he said, "Hello, kitten." Holding her slim hands. Wanting to take her into his arms. "Your husband, remember? Meet Johnny Rogers."

"Hi, Johnny," she said.

"Hello, baby."

"Crazy!" Sue whispered happily. She picked up his coffee and hamburger and led the way to a secluded, small table. Her soft brown hair was wind-blown, her smooth cheeks bright from the cold. She was wearing a coat with the collar upturned about her slim throat, and beneath the coat Johnny saw that Sue was still wearing her neatly starched counter apron.

She was talking, and her eyes were dancing. "I'm off duty the rest of today and tonight. That's why I was just down to the farmhouse. Mrs. Slater is driving into Irwin this afternoon. I'll be in with her, and I'll meet you at the hotel, darling."

He was holding her hand across the small table, and he was saying, "Swell. Make it two o'clock—"

"Three," said Sue, smiling. "You've got to get your sleep. Besides, I've still got some doo-dads to buy for the kitchen—"

"It's a hell of a thing that a man can't even sleep with his bride." His voice held laughter. "Now I always say—"

"Drink your coffee, darling."

They kept talking. Finally Johnny looked at his watch. "I'll walk you down to Mrs. Slater's, hon."

"You haven't time. You'll be late at the terminal."

Sue boarded at Mrs. Slater's place, a rambling farmhouse that had been made over for the accommodation of employees who worked far out here on the Turnpike, in the heart of the mountains. The boarding house lay almost a quarter mile behind Midway, and was reached by a country lane. Sometimes Johhny worried—

Sue was saying, "Besides, Johnny, I'd almost forgotten." She nodded toward the counter. "He'd like to get a ride into Irwin with you. He asked me a little while ago."

"Who?" Johnny turned his head.

"That man seated alone at the counter."

It was the slim, dark man who had watched Johnny as the truck driver came into the room. Johnny looked back at Sue and asked, "Who is he?"

"Don't you remember him, darling? He barged in with a friend of a friend who was invited to the party at the hotel last week. He was looking for Blocky, only Blocky hadn't got there yet, and so he didn't wait."

Johnny's eyes flickered. He remembered the man now. "Wasn't he a soldier or something?"

Sue nodded. "He's been on leave. He was stopping at a farm down near Mrs. Slater's. First, he asked about Blocky. He was going to get a ride to Irwin with him—"

"Blocky's off tonight."

"That's what I told him. Then he asked if you were due through soon, and so he

waited." Sue's fingers touched his hand. "I know you're not supposed to pick up riders, hon. But he's a soldier, and I guess it's pretty important that he get into Irwin before morning. Perhaps he has to catch a train back to camp or something—"

Johnny stood up. "Okay, kitten, for you I'll do it." He looked down into her entrancing face. "Remember, two o'clock this afternoon—"

"I'd like to kiss you, darling," Sue whispered.

"Cut it out, Mommie!"

Johnny moved across to the counter, paid his check, then stepped to the thin man who was seated alone. "Okay," he said. "You've got a ride to Irwin. Ready?"

The man slid off the stool with alacrity. "Thanks! Thanks a lot." It occurred to Johnny that he was no young draftee, if he was a soldier like Sue said. He must have been about thirty, and he was a slender, lean-looking man with dark hair and eyes.

The man followed Johnny and the girl out into the night and toward the semi-trailer. Johnny unlocked the cab door. He reached inside, switched on his running lights. He motioned the stranger into the cab. "I'll be right with you, friend."

Sue took Johnny's arm as he moved back past the long trailer in order to check the two-dozen-odd colored riding lights and the tires. Then he walked her to the gate located in the high wire fence behind the large parking area of the station. The fence bordered the Turnpike on either side for one hundred and sixty miles, and was a precaution against woods' animals wandering out onto the highway.

Johnny's arm was around her shoulder. "See you this afternoon, Mrs. Rogers."

She pressed against him. He kissed her. He thought he was the luckiest guy in the world.

"Good night, Poppy."

He watched her trim figure disappear down the path beyond the high gate. He turned back toward the truck, and his heart was pounding like crazy.

THE passenger held out a flat silver cigarette case as Johnny swung up into the high cab of the truck. "Smoke?"

"Thanks."

The man's dark eyes were level on Johnny's face. "There's something I'd like to ask you about Blocky Edwards. A friend of yours, isn't he?"

Johnny nodded above the glow of the match held cupped in his hands. He delayed a moment before starting off, a little curious about this man and the man's question. "Blocky drives for our outfit. Lives in Irwin. That's about eighty miles from here. We'll be there at four-thirty."

"Yes," said the man; "I know." His dark eyes held a question. "Wasn't it about two weeks ago that your friend Blocky was hi-jacked out there near Clear Ridge, beyond here?"

The question startled Johnny, because it was supposed that no one knew anything about that night. "Then you've heard?" he said. He tried to be casual.

His passenger nodded.

Johnny shrugged. "It wasn't a hold-up, really. Blocky was on the run to Philly. A car was parked off the road and apparently in trouble. Blocky stopped —and one of the two guys in the car slugged him. That's all he remembers. When he woke up again he was right in the cab of the truck, and his cargo had not been tampered with and nothing was wrong at all. It was a funny thing."

"And the alarm system had not been set off?"

"No." Johnny looked sharply at the man. "And if anyone didn't have the right keys, and tried to get at the cargo, the alarm would have automatically gone off."

"And it didn't."

Johnny said, "You sound like an I. C. C. inspector."

"Not exactly," the passenger said. He flicked his cigarette through the partially lowered window, then said, "I guess I'm delaying you."

Johnny started the motor, then was put-

ting the tractor smoothly through the nine forward speeds. They rolled through one of the wide service lanes, past gas pumps. Johnny flicked his hand at one of the attendants, who waved. Then they were picking up momentum on the long acceleration lane that slowly coincided with the Turnpike.

Johnny saw the Ford pickup approaching in the opposing lane. It was the service car from the transport terminal in Irwin, and as the car slowed the driver wig-wagged his lights in a road driver's signal that indicated he wanted to see Johnny.

Watching from the rolled-down window, Johnny saw the service car bump across the turf strip separating the two wide lanes of the Turnpike. The car swung into North Midway.

Johnny cut the motor, removed the keys and said to his passenger, "I'll be back in a minute."

He hurried back along the lane into the station. Beyond the building, in the floodlighted parking area, he saw the two truck drivers and the stalled straight job. A big man with ruddy features had climbed out of the Ford pickup. He hailed Johnny.

"Give these fellows a hand with this cylinder head, will you, kid? This business! No. 10 rolled in tonight with a burned-out bearing and now I've got to stay up all night to see that they get her out by morning."

Johnny grinned. "What if it had been a main spring, Lou?"

Lou Ward, foreman at the terminal in Irwin, growled something, dumped a large copper head gasket and stuff on the running board of the straight job then hurried back to the pickup. "See you at the terminal," he said. He paused and looked at Johnny. "Who's that guy in your truck?"

Johnny told him about the soldier. Lou Ward said, "Well, seeing as how he's a soldier, I guess it's all right." He slammed the car door and roared off into the night, heading back toward Irwin.

The pug-nosed driver with the jolly eyes smiled at Johnny. "That Lou Ward always has troubles. Always beefing."

"He wouldn't be happy if he wasn't," said Johnny. He climbed up on the high fender, braced his legs, helped with removal of the heavy cylinder head, which had already been loosened. Installation of the new gasket would only be a matter of minutes. The other driver, the big fellow from the Black Diamond truck, helped them.

Johnny asked, "How come Lou got out here so fast?"

"We called the terminal from the Blue Mountain station on the way across the Turnpike. That's where the gasket started letting go. At that, he made it out here in a little over an hour. The way that guy drives!"

The cold of late night had settled down, and numbed their hands as they worked, and finally when they were done Johnny flapped his stiff fingers briskly against his legs and said, "Well—luck!" and he started back toward his unit.

A white-painted Pennsylvania State Police sedan was just swinging into the service driveway before the station. The car slid to a stop and a tall trooper got out. His attention immediately centered on Johnny Rogers, then he indicated the trailer job parked far down the acceleration lane in the darkness. "Is that your truck?" There was something about his voice, it occurred to Johnny.

Johnny nodded.

"Come on, then," said the tall trooper.

Johnny was frowning. "What's wrong?"

The smartly uniformed trooper was leading the way along the wide traffic lane. His face looked grim. "He's dead," he announced. "The guy in your truck."

"Dead!"

"Stabbed," said the trooper.

II

JOHNNY was saying, "It's a fine thing! I never thought I'd be driving a hearse!"

One of the officers who was helping with the grim unloading of the dead man from his cab, turned and looked at the truck driver. "You'd better come inside," he said.

And watching them, Johnny was remembering the strange ride here from the Midway station. The small State police barracks building was quite a few miles from Midway; the trooper had ordered Johnny to drive there, and the man had preceded him on the Turnpike.

He remembered driving through the cold night, a dead man on the cab seat beside him. A hell of a thing indeed.

He watched as they got the body out of the seat and moved toward the police barracks—a small made-over house that set back off the Turnpike. There were two or three State police cars pulled up alongside the building.

Inside, a lieutenant took charge as the men came in with their grim burden. He was saying, "We got hold of Doc Watson. He'll look him over. Take him in the back room."

He did not follow the officers, but looked at Johnny, and then at the officer who had brought Johnny in from Midway. "You're Johnny Rogers, is that right?"

Johnny nodded.

"What do you know about this thing?"

"No more than you," said Johnny. He lighted a cigarette, felt a little of the nervous tension flow out of him as he dragged deeply. That ride in with a corpse seated beside you—!

"Who was he?"

"I don't know," Johnny said.

"What was he doing out there at Midway?" The lieutenant looked at the highway patrolman who had accompanied Johnny. "You phoned that no one knew anything about the guy out there. They only think that he was a soldier on leave or something, and staying at some farm near there?"

"That's all I got," said the officer.

The lieutenant was waiting for Johnny's answer. Johnny said, "I told you, I don't know a thing."

"Then what was he doing in your truck?"

"I was giving him a lift—"

"You're not supposed to pick up riders. You must have known him—"

The highway officer was dumping things on a table beside him. He said, "This is all I found on the guy. Not a single thing that will identify him."

There was a key ring, with two house keys; a wallet containing a considerable amount of currency, but no cards, papers, not even a driver's license; a full pack of cigarettes; a pad of matches that carried Turnpike advertising; a folded clean handkerchief; some small change.

The lieutenant continued significantly, "Things could have been removed from the wallet before you found him—"

Johnny tensed. He had felt something building up inside him ever since this lieutenant had started his questioning. The man had the kind of eyes that were suspicious of any and all types of people. They were also hard.

Johnny said sharply, "Here it is, and you can kick it around any way you like: That man was alive and breathing when we started out of Midway. Lou Ward—I guess you know him—pulled in from Irwin to deliver a gasket on a breakdown job, and flagged me to wait. I went back. Lou left shortly after for Irwin and I came back to

my truck." Johnny nodded to the highway patrolman who had picked him up. "He found the man there in the cab, stabbed, while I was back there at the station helping them with the cylinder head. You can keep me here all night and that's as far as we'll get. I can't hang around here. I'm due in Irwin at four—"

"Take it easy," said the lieutenant. "We're not saying you killed him, are we?"

Johnny mashed out his cigarette beneath his heel. One thing he didn't like was to be crowded. He could have phoned Sue, from here, and have her tell them how the stranger had asked for a ride into Irwin; how, until the man had first spoken to him there at Midway, he had never seen him before in his life. Johnny could do this.

BUT why call that sweet kid in the middle of the night and get her all upset? She'd never get a wink of sleep, and tomorrow she was coming into town.

There was another thing, an item that burned in the back of Johnny's mind. The stranger had asked about Blocky Edwards, Johnny's friend. Why had the rider been so interested in Blocky, Johnny wondered. Had there been more to that peculiar "hold-up" out on the Turnpike than Blocky Edwards had told him?

He intended to find out—before he told this lieutenant anything!

The officer was saying to his superior, "So that's all there was. No knife. Nothing. And none of the employees at the Midway station had seen a thing. I don't understand it."

The door to the rear room opened and a small rotund man came out. His sleeves were rolled up to the elbows.

"Well?" said the big lieutenant, looking at him.

The county coroner said, "Stabbed all right. Heart."

"Front or back?"

"I'd say," the little doctor said importantly, "that the victim had been facing the man who killed him. It was a nice clean job—"

"There's nothing clean about murder," said the lieutenant. He looked at Johnny and made a motion with his big hand. "All right, you can get going." He jotted down Johnny's hotel address, his room number, said, "We'll send someone around later."

Johnny swung and headed for the door, all the time feeling the lieutenant's eyes boring into his back. It was some little thing about that man's attitude that irritated him. A guy minded his own business, and then suddenly something like this happened, and right away the police wanted to pin something on you. It was a hell of a thing!

Behind the big wheel again, thundering through the night, he tried to tell himself that he shouldn't get upset; that he ought to forget the whole thing. After all, *he* hadn't known the man. And why someone should murder the fellow was a job for the State police to figure out.

And then Johnny remembered the cigarette case and his mind started probing all over again.

HE remembered that the stranger had passed the flat silver case when he had offered Johnny a cigarette. And that State patrolman had gone through the dead man's pockets, brought the stuff along to the local barracks, dumped the items there on the table.

But there had been no cigarette case!

Johnny had overlooked it at the moment. He wondered—

Holding the wheel with his left hand, his eyes on the road, Johnny slid his fingers down behind the leather seat and started feeling around. Squeezed down between the cushion and the back of the seat, his fingertips located the flat, smooth object. He worked it loose, checked his speed a little, shot a glimpse at the case in the soft dashlight glow.

There were two small neatly engraved initials on the front. "E. W." He won-

dered if they were the dead man's initials. Probably. Because the man had been carrying a package of cigarettes as well as the silver case. It was obviously a recent gift.

Johnny dropped the case into his pocket and decided he'd try to find out something about it later. His first lead was his friend Blocky Edwards. And Johnny wanted to talk to Blocky before the police got to him. Blocky was a pretty swell guy.

He was pushing the semi-job up the long approach to Laurel Hill Tunnel, last of the seven tunnels across the great Turnpike. There was a sign: TUNNEL AHEAD. SLOW DOWN TO FIFTY. Powerful overhead fog lights cast a yellow-saffron glow. Swiftly the highway narrowed into two single lanes, while ahead appeared the round bore of the tunnel opening in steep rock walls that rose out of sight in the overcast night.

Johnny sent the truck plunging into the almost mile-long tunnel, blue-green mercury lights catching his somber features in a daylight brightness. The motor roar, compressed, crashed back from the curved cement walls, and filled the cab, and all the time Johnny was thinking of that man, so very much alive, who had been sitting there beside him just such a short while ago.

A moment later he rocketed out of the tunnel, hit the long downgrade, kicked the tractor out of gear and let her roll. It was not quite thirty miles to the western terminus of the Turnpike. He had lost time to make up. His attention was riveted on the road and the feel of huge tires beneath him and the curves that loomed up in the distance. That way, he managed not to think quite so much about a dead man.

Then it was over, the long miles of super highway, the mountains, most of the wide State of Pennsylvania behind him.

JOHNNY turned in his toll card and charges at the exit gatehouse, then followed the sweeping cut-off that led into the slumbering little village of Irwin, where the Wayburn Freight terminal was located. A cold, pre-dawn stillness enfolded the sleeping village as the huge transport truck rumbled through the deserted streets.

Then, ahead, neon lights of an all-night diner flashed cheerful welcome. Johnny pulled up, locked the cab door behind him and hurried inside the diner. It was empty, except for the short order man seated at the end of the counter, reading a newspaper.

The man looked up. "How's it, kid?"

Johnny said, "Blocky Edwards been around tonight?" He knew that it was his friend's night off; Blocky often stopped by the diner.

"He was in early," said the man. "Said something about going into Pittsburg. Was going to stay all night."

"Oh," said Johnny thoughtfully.

He swallowed a quick cup of coffee and moved toward the door. "If he should drop in, have him call me at the hotel."

"Okay."

Johnny drove to the terminal garage, beeped his horn, was already out of the cab and headed for the office as a mechanic appeared through a small doorway beside the big garage doors.

"Lou Ward here?" Johnny called to the grease-monkey, as the man started to check tires and gas for the relay run to Chicago. He wanted to tell Lou Ward about the murder.

"Lou's gone to Pittsburg with a tire," the garage man called from where he was busy checking the riding lights. He looked at Johnny and grinned. "An' hoppin' mad, too. Stimson's tied up down there with No. 29."

Johnny recalled that Stimson was a road driver on the way in from Columbus. That meant Lou Ward, the foreman, would be tied up most of the night.

So there was nothing Johnny could do now until later in the day. And he was tired. What he wanted to do was get a little sleep. Sue would be coming in this afternoon, to meet him.

He went into the deserted office, punched his trip card, dropped it in the rack. A few

moments later he was hurrying through the quiet streets in the cold night. It would soon be dawn. He wished he had only been able to see Blocky, to find out what Blocky might know about that stranger.

But, temporarily, there was nothing Johnny could do.

THE telephone was ringing.

The *phone - was - ringing - like --everything,* and what Johnny desired most was to bury his face in the soft pillow and sleep. He squinted one half-open eye from beneath the warmness of the heavy comforter and saw the alarm clock atop the dresser. 2:05. Half drugged with sleep he dimly remembered that Sue had said she'd call him about three o'clock. Well, that was a long time yet, and in the bedroom it was cold and breezy and raw, and outside the wide-open window the sky looked leaden gray. Like snow, in fact, it occurred to him vaguely.

He stared at the clock again and suddenly, with a start, he realized that it must be 2:05 *in the afternoon.* And the telephone was still ringing shrilly. Wide awake now, Johnny bounced out of bed and grabbed for the receiver. "Ye-es?" He cleared the froggy squeak from his voice and said more plainly, "Yes?" again.

"Is this Mr. Rogers—Johnny Rogers?"

He said that it was, and there was something about the woman's voice— Had he heard it before? Not Sue's, he knew at once; but a voice more mature and somewhat tense.

"Yes?" said Johnny, clutching the phone. He frowned. He wondered what woman would be calling him.

"There's something you must do," the low, tense voice hurried on. "It is about the——"

Then the voice stopped, and over and above the hum of the open line Johnny faintly caught another sound that lingered in his ears. Later, he was to try and remember that sound, but for the life of him he could not quite make out what it was. Soft, like two different notes struck on a harp.

He said impatiently, "Yes—yes? What is it you want?"

And the woman's voice did not respond. Instead, there was a click on the line and it went dead. Either she had hung up—or had been cut off, he wondered which.

Johnny jiggled the hook and the desk clerk downstairs on the desk plugged in. "Look," said Johnny. "Can you trace that call that I just had?"

"I'm afraid not, sir," said the desk clerk. Then he said, "Besides, I have another call on the line for you now. Do you wish to take it?"

"Put them on!"

And it was Sue, that sweet kid, and in her voice was excitement and tenseness and something more.

"Johnny!" she said.

"Sue, baby, you sound like—"

"Johnny, *please!*" she cried. "I'm right here in a booth across the street. I can't come up to the room because——"

He said, "And why not, pray tell? After all, we were married legally, and besides you're cute."

Sue said, "Johnny, a couple of men just entered the hotel, and if you ask me they look like detectives, and that's why I want you to meet me *here,* as soon as you can."

"Where?"

"In that little tearoom just across the street. I'll be in the rear booth." Her voice was trembling. "I don't think anyone's seen me, darling, so if you're careful—"

"Why *shouldn't* anyone see you?" demanded Johnny.

"—Because it's about that man who was murdered last night in your truck!" Sue told him with startling suddenness. "There's something I want to tell you before *they* find out!"

"Who?"

"Please hurry, Johnny!" And she hung up.

He had just put on his trousers and was

pulling on a heavy flannel shirt—it looked like snow outside the room window—when someone was thudding loudly on the door. Still buttoning his shirt, Johnny moved across the room.

The two men stood there in the hallway.

"You're Johnny Rogers?"

The one who had spoken was a big man, solid-looking, with slate-gray hair and a ruddy complexion. He looked just like a detective is supposed to look, except that he wore a dark Homburg instead of a derby.

Johnny recalled that his name was Mark Kirgan, and that at one time he'd been a Homicide man in the Pittsburg department, only now he was a county dick and he took things a little more easy. He'd been called in once because of a small robbery at the terminal garage.

"I've sort of expected you," said Johnny, and opened the door wider for them to enter.

"Just want to ask a couple of questions," said the big man, Mark Kirgan, coming into the room. The thin, dark man followed at Kirgan's heels. The smaller man was inclined to be nervous.

"Well?" said Johnny, waiting.

Kirgan sat down on the edge of the bed and placed his big hands on his knees. He said, "You left Philly at six o'clock yesterday afternoon and rolled in here at approximately four-thirty this morning, right?"

"Four-thirty-two," Johnny said. He was thinking, *They sure didn't lose any time checking up.*

"Right," said Kirgan, consulting a slip of paper that he took from his pocket. "And you picked up that man last night at Midway, on the Turnpike, at approximately—"

"Two-thirty," said Johnny.

"Right."

Johnny's lips were a harsh, flat line across his teeth. He didn't like this repetition of questions. Why the blazes didn't they get to the point? Or—were they building up to something? What was their game?

Kirgan said, "The State police have been busy all night. That dead guy spoke to a few people out there around North Midway." The detective's keen eyes flicked to Johnny's. "What he seemed most interested in was that hi-jacking pulled on one of you Wayburn Freight drivers a couple weeks ago."

"Yes?" said Johnny.

"On that friend of yours—fellow named Blocky Edwards."

Johnny thought a moment, then said, "That man was asking me a few questions when he first got in the cab last night. I told him just what happened. Blocky was stopped, knocked out by a couple guys in a car. But nothing was stolen from his cargo. It was a funny thing."

"Yeah—funny," Kirgan said quietly. He met Johnny's eyes again. "Where was Blocky Edwards last night?"

"I don't know," Johnny said truthfully.

"What did you do after you checked into the terminal this morning, Rogers?"

"Came here and went to bed," Johnny said. He jammed out his cigarette in an ashtray. His eyes flickered coolly. "And slept!" he added.

Kirgan had got to his feet and was moving around the room. The small, nervous man stood near the door, watching the big detective. Kirgan, in a casual manner, picked up the alarm clock, noted the alarm set for three o'clock, pushed down the button with his thumb so that the alarm was shut off.

But there was nothing casual, Johnny thought, about Kirgan's eyes. They were penetrating and watchful, and Johnny knew that Kirgan was making swift note of each detail of the room; the rumpled bed, the crushed pillow, the pajamas flung hurriedly across a chair.

Then suddenly, because he didn't like this stalling around, because he was upset and worried about meeting Sue, he said sharply, "Listen, Kirgan. Say what you

have to say and be done with it. Sure, I picked up that stranger last night and was going to give him a lift into Irwin. Then, while I was away from the truck for a few minutes, he was stabbed. Murdered. I don't know who did it; I don't know who the fellow was. Now, what more do you want?"

Mark Kirgan turned away from the window. Casualness dropped from his big frame. His eyes held harshly on Johnny. He said:

"I want to know where's your wife?"

III

JOHNNY complimented himself later on the way he got rid of them. Kirgan was a tough cop to fool. He had said, "The State barracks called your wife this morning in order to verify your statements. She wasn't at that boarding house out there on the Turnpike."

"She was probably at work," Johnny said.

"She wasn't there, either."

Naturally she wasn't there; Johnny knew that. She had probably been on her way into Irwin at the time. But he said casually, "You perhaps missed her while she was walking up to the place from the farm." He looked out the window. Snowflakes, soft and large, were falling. He frowned. "I've got a relay run back to Philly tonight. It's going to be mean driving. I've got to get down to the terminal soon—"

Kirgan gave him a brief smile. "All right, Rogers. We'll talk to you again later." He nodded to his assistant and they started out. In the doorway, Mark Kirgan paused. "I'll see your wife later."

They went out.

Maybe he's not such a bad guy after all, Johnny thought. Hard, but square.

He quickly finished dressing, glanced out the window again. It looked like a blizzard. Snow was falling in big chunks, kicked around by the wind, swirling against the window sill. He saw Kirgan and the thin dark man emerge from the lobby and get into a coupé that was parked at the curb. They drove off.

Two minutes later Johnny was entering the tearoom located across the street. Soft lights were turned on. Outside, the sky was gray and dull. He felt somewhat out of place in his heavy leather jacket. But nevertheless he looked pretty good. In his clear eyes glowed a light for this lovely girl who was his bride of a week.

He saw Sue seated there as he strode back through the quiet room. At this hour of the afternoon the small place was empty. Johnny slid into the booth beside her trim, dainty figure, kissed her swiftly, clutched her hand.

She searched his face with her wide gray eyes. "Johnny, why did this have to happen to us?"

He forced a grin. "There's nothing to worry about, kitten. We—"

"But there is!" said Sue, her voice unsteady.

He looked at her.

"I rode in with Mrs. Slater, you know—"

"Where is she now?"

"She had to do some shopping. That's what I wanted to do, too, for our new apartment—" Her fingers tightened on his big hand. "But now—"

There was fright in her eyes. "Johnny, after I heard about that man being murdered, I got to thinking. I mean, this morning I got to thinking about it while I was taking a shower. I had to wait for one of the other girls to get through in the bathroom and then—"

Johnny said patiently, "Can't you skip that part of it, angel?"

"Well, I got to thinking about Mary Collins."

He frowned. "I don't believe I know any Mary Collins."

"I know you don't, darling."

"Who is she?"

Sue said, "She's the woman who rented the farm a few weeks ago."

Johnny saw where this was going to take time. Sue had a way of talking like this. A nice way. It was one of the cute things he liked about his wife. But right now he had little time to spare, and he found himself tense. He prodded gently:

"Get to the point, kitten. What about Mary Collins?"

Sue pushed the plate containing the untouched sandwich aside. "Well, this soldier, this man who got—killed—was staying there at that farm with Mary Collins. I saw him go down there a couple of times. It's about a half mile from Mrs. Slater's. I just happened to hear Mary Collins' name mentioned one day and that's how I remembered—"

"She was probably his wife," Johnny said brightly. "Perhaps this will solve the whole thing, because certainly Mary Collins will know who he *is!*"

"I don't think so," Sue said quietly.

"You don't think what, hon?"

"I went down there to that farm today to ask her the same thing—and she's disappeared. No one was there at all!"

A waitress had taken Johnny's order for coffee and rolls, set the items before him, disappeared through a doorway in the rear of the room. Johnny put down his coffee cup now and looked intently at Sue.

"It's damned peculiar," he said.

"Johnny, I'm frightened!" And she was. She really was! Her slim hand trembled on his arm. "Last night, after I left you out at Midway, while I was hurrying along that lane to the farmhouse, someone passed me in the darkness. Someone who was in an awful hurry, Johnny. A woman."

"Going in what direction, hon?"

"She must have been coming from Midway station. I heard her running down the path, and stepped aside, and I don't think she even saw me!"

Instantly he thought of this person Sue had just mentioned. "Mary Collins?" he asked.

Sue nodded. "It must have been her. I can't think of anyone else."

Johnny's face was grim. "I don't like it, baby," he rapped. "I don't like it at all. Why does this crime center around you and me?"

Sue stared at him out of wide eyes. She said dully, "And today I was going to do some shopping for the apartment. I need some tie-backs for the kitchen curtains, and I need—"

Johnny finished his coffee, stood up with the determination of a young man with a purpose, said, "Well, you go right ahead and do that shopping. Get your mind off this thing. I want to go down to the garage and see Lou Ward a minute, anyway. Meet me there before it's time for me to take over the relay, huh?"

And now he tried to make his voice cheerful. Here, within a few days, they had planned to move into the small apartment in Irwin. But this thing had had to happen to them. The quicker he got to the bottom of it, the better.

Outside, the snow was still coming down steadily. The wind had died a little. Johnny's eyes took in the sky. It looked as if the storm was going to last, and out on the Turnpike, in the mountains, tonight, it was going to be mean for a road jockey pushing tons of cargo across the highway.

He pressed Sue's slim arm and said brightly, "You'd better hurry and get done. Find Mrs. Slater and tell her not to take too long."

He watched her move off toward a dime store down the street. His wife. It made a guy feel pretty proud.

THE garage was a bedlam of sound. The heavy odor of Diesel fuel hung over the place, and got into your nostrils and into your blood, and it was good. Johnny moved past the huge transports, nimbly dodged past a tractor that was backing into position before a long, loaded trailer. Other companies besides Wayburn Freight used this terminal. It was an exchange point for various outfits.

A truck jockey saw Johnny's tall, quick-

moving figure and hailed him. The fellow shouted above the uproar of motors being tuned up. "Who was that guy got knocked off in your truck last night, Johnny kid?"

Johnny grimaced. Here it was. Everyone would be asking the same questions over and over.

But he shot the other driver a swift grin and said, "Your guess is as good as mine, Benny. I wouldn't know."

"The cops think it's because of those defense shipments."

Johnny Rogers had been waiting for this. He had wondered how long it would take the police to jump to that conclusion. He asked:

"They've been here?"

The stocky driver nodded, indicating the doorway to the office, across the wide garage area.

"A dick named Kirgan is in there now, asking questions. From the way I get it, there was something coming through from a defense plant in Chicago. Some secret navy gadget. They think now that's why Blocky's load was held up that night. The guys were looking for that particular shipment, only it hadn't come through as they figured."

"Blocky Edwards told Kirgan that?" Johnny wanted to know.

The driver nodded. "Blocky's in there with them now."

A long trailer job backed out. They stepped aside. Johnny spoke loudly against the throb of powerful Diesels. "What connection would the soldier I picked up have to do with that?"

"Kirgan doesn't think he was a soldier. The State police've been checking different camps. No one can identify that dead guy."

Johnny's eyes were thoughtful as he moved toward the office. He knew that a lot of the cargo coming through these days was defense stuff on the way to Philadelphia shipyards. And there had been something mysterious about that attempted hi-jacking of Blocky Edwards' load that night a couple of weeks ago. Perhaps crooks—spies, for that matter—could have been looking for something.

But it still didn't explain the dead man who no one was able to identify. Or a woman named Mary Collins, who had disappeared. It worried him that Sue had seen a woman out there in the darkness behind Midway last night. A woman running away from something—when murder had just happened! It placed this lovely child who was his wife in a somewhat dangerous position. Was it possible that the unknown woman had recognized *Sue?*

Johnny tried to shrug off his uneasiness, started through the doorway into the office.

Lou Ward, terminal foreman, his face beet-red and his sleeves rolled up over muscled arms, came plodding out of the room. He saw Johnny and drew up.

"It's enough to drive you nuts!" Lou Ward said.

Johnny grinned. "Trouble, Lou?"

"Listen," said the big foreman, "I'm out all night on breakdowns. A guy gets himself stabbed on your relay." He waved a paw of a hand toward the windows. "And now we're going to have a blizzard. No. 10"—he poked a thick thumb at Johnny's chest—"that's your relay—is rolling in over an hour late from Chicago! God!"

Lou Ward was like that. He wouldn't be happy, Johnny and everyone else knew, unless he was beefing about something.

Johnny said, "Then I won't have to be rolling out of here until six or after. Swell. I have some things I want to do. Sue's in town."

Lou Ward looked at him. He gave way to a smile for a moment. He was a handsome man, in a way. Thick steel-gray hair, a big frame that was still hard and conditioned. He was slightly lame, the result of an accident that happened years ago when he had been a road jockey himself.

He was saying, "That was a swell party you and Sue gave for the gang last week. The missus and I enjoyed ourselves. Drop over some night after you and Sue get located here in town."

"Thanks," said Johnny, and he moved on into the office as Lou Ward disappeared toward the garage, already bellowing at a mechanic out there.

Johnny saw Mark Kirgan, the county dick, talking to the girl who was the bookkeeper here at the terminal. They were busy. Seated on a railing that separated Lou Ward's "office" from the remainder of the room, was a lean, tall young man with a driver's cap resting precariously on the back of his head. He had brick-red hair and sharp, long features. He was munching on a candy bar, part of which he still held in his hand.

He looked up and said cheerfully, "Hi, kid," as Johnny came into the room. He pushed the confection at Johnny. "Bite? A new one—'Crispy-coated Nougat Special.' Pretty good, too."

Blocky Edwards was a pushover for candy bars. He was also one of the best drivers in the employ of Wayburn Freight, and Johnny's best friend.

Johnny said, "How's it, kid?" and saw Kirgan glance toward them, then start talking to the girl again. Johnny dropped his voice lower and said, "I tried to reach you when I rolled in this morning."

Blocky Edwards shot a glance toward the detective. Kirgan's back was to them. He spoke swiftly and quietly around a mouthful of candy bar. "I just got back from Pittsburg. I just heard about it." There was an expression in his eyes, a somber, almost tense look that Johnny noted. "Meet me around the corner at the diner in a few minutes. I'll wait there."

"Did you know that man I picked up?"

Blocky said, "I'll tell you something," quickly, and then slid off the railing as Mark Kirgan turned away from the girl and stepped toward them. Blocky Edwards raised his voice. "Yep," he said for the benefit of the heavy-set detective. "The best one I've found yet." He indicated the bar of candy. "Of course, the 'Crunchy-Snicker' isn't bad, either."

Blocky's features looked suddenly worried and he looked up at Kirgan as the detective came up to them. "How about it, Kirgan?" he said. "Is it all right if I run along and get a little shut-eye? You want me any more?"

Kirgan shook his head.

"Where's Lou Ward?" the county detective asked Johnny.

"Out in the garage." Johnny pointed. "What have you found out?"

Mark Kirgan's intense, dark eyes looked at Johnny thoughtfully. "Not much." Then he said, "Seen your wife yet? I heard she was in town."

This man doesn't overlook a thing, Johnny thought. He grinned. "All right, Kirgan. Where can we meet you, say, in about half an hour?" He guessed maybe he ought to tell Kirgan what Sue had told him. Kirgan was all right.

"My office at the station," the detective said. "That's just around on the next block."

"I know where it is."

HE WATCHED Kirgan go through the doorway to the garage, then glanced at the clock above him on the wall. It was three-thirty. If the relay unit coming in from Chicago was an hour late, that meant Johnny would not be taking over until after six o'clock. He could use that extra time now.

He got a fresh trip card, made a notation on it about the Chicago unit being late, left the card in the rack until he would leave for Philadelphia later this evening. He kept thinking about Blocky Edwards' remark, and that Blocky was waiting for him around the corner at the diner. Johnny had just swung toward the street door when the woman came in.

"Oh, hello," she said, and he thought she appeared just a little startled as she saw him.

Mrs. Ward was tall and slim, with yellow hair the color of butter. She wore a short silver fox jacket and she used eye-shadow. It heightened the fullness of her

large blue eyes. She looked, Johnny always thought, like the well-dressed women you saw on Park Avenue. Here in Irwin, people considered her "glamorous."

Johnny said, "Hello, Mrs. Ward," and stepped aside to let the terminal foreman's wife move on into the office. But she paused.

"That was a terrible thing that happened last night, Johnny." Her eyes held somberly on his. "Lou told me."

"It puts me on a spot," Johnny said.

"Why should it?"

"Picking up that man in the first place. I shouldn't have, you know."

"Have they found out who he was?" The woman had a quick, alert way of talking.

Johnny shrugged. "Not yet." It occurred to him that this was the first time Lou Ward's wife had ever really been friendly. In fact, it was the first time she had ever addressed him as "Johnny." Of course she had been there to the party last week, along with Lou, but even then she had been reserved and sort of aloof from the rest of the crowd. They had only dropped in for a short while, at the hotel, where the wedding party had been held in one of the larger rooms.

But now there was something that bothered Johnny Rogers. He had the feeling that Mrs. Ward was trying to get around to asking him something. It was in her manner.

He saw her glance across at the girl seated at the desk. The girl was bent over some ledgers. Mrs. Ward looked quickly back at Johnny.

"There's something I want to ask—" she started quickly, and then the door from the service garage opened and Lou Ward, followed by the county detective, came through.

And Mrs. Ward was saying brightly and quickly, in a different voice, "Tell your wife I said hello. She's such a sweet child." Then she turned toward her husband.

Johnny went out.

IV

SNOW was packing down on the sidewalks, and the air was sharp and cold. Snow-flakes pelted against his face.

What had the woman been going to say? It puzzled him. And the way she had spoken about Sue, her manner changing as the two men came back into the office, told Johnny that she had not wanted them to know.

Know what?

His jaw set squarely as he strode through the white storm. He remembered that mysterious phone call to his room at 2:05 this afternoon. Could it have been Mrs. Ward? He hardly knew the woman. And yet it was strange the way she had acted just now. It *could* have been she who made the telephone call.

Angles, Johnny thought tensely. There were angles to this mystery that had not yet been revealed. Things were cropping up. What they were going to lead to, he did not know.

He turned the corner, a moment later was entering the dining car located midway down the block. Two transport trucks were parked in front of the place. The drivers were bent over a pin-ball machine at one end of the lunchroom. Blocky Edwards motioned to Johnny from the far end of the corner. He was seated alone.

The easy, somewhat crooked smile was no longer on the red-headed truck driver's face. He spoke quietly as Johnny slid onto a stool beside him. "Did Kirgan say anything?"

Johnny looked at his friend. "No." Then, "Why?"

"He has an idea I knew that guy who was in your truck last night. And Kirgan isn't convinced that I spent last night down in Pittsburg?"

"Did you?"

Blocky Edwards grinned briefly. "I picked up fifty bucks in a little game." He added, "I was off last night and today. Have a run to Chicago tomorrow." His

long face was serious again. "But about this dead guy. I think he could be identified."

"You mean—"

"I think Lou Ward's wife knew him."

Johnny said nothing for a moment. He remembered the way the garage foreman's wife had started to speak to him just a few moments ago. Then, there was the phone call, which could have been from her.

He said, "What makes you think so, Blocky?"

Blocky said, "Remember that night of your party last week at the hotel?"

Johnny nodded, waiting.

"Well, that soldier — or whatever he was—came there. He came to the door and asked if Mrs. Ward was there. Then, when he saw the crowd, he said never mind and left. It was funny. And there's another thing."

"What?"

"One afternoon last week I saw that guy in her car. I was pulling into town and they were parked just outside Irwin. She must have picked him up some place. You know the way Estelle Ward goes batting around in that Lincoln Zephyr."

"What did you call her?" Johnny was suddenly tense.

"Estelle. That's her name."

And Johnny was reaching for that flat silver case that was still in his pocket. He had never heard Lou Ward's wife called by her first name. In fact, he had never known what it was. But now it meant much!

He looked at the initials on the flat case, and Blocky Edwards looked at them, and he was saying, "E. W.—Estelle Ward. It could be—"

"Hers?" Blocky said.

Johnny nodded.

"Where did you get it?"

JOHNNY told him. He added, "And there's no chance of fingerprints being on the thing, because it was jammed down behind the seat, and I would have spoiled any prints getting it out of there."

"Why do you think that guy left it there?"

Johnny's blue eyes were thoughtful. "Perhaps," he mused slowly, "he recognized his murderer. Maybe he tried to leave some sort of clue."

Blocky Edwards' eyes batted. "You don't mean—Estelle Ward?"

"I don't know what I mean," admitted Johnny. He was frowning. "Someone tried to phone me at the hotel at two o'clock this afternoon. A woman." He told about the way Estelle Ward had just acted at the terminal office. "It could have been her." He stared down at the cigarette case palmed in his hand. "I don't know what to say."

His friend was gripping his arm. "Look, Johnny. Don't turn that thing over to Kirgan—yet. It might not be hers at all." He stared sharply at Johnny. "She's a pretty swell person. I was going to be laid off about six months ago when Wayburn Freight lost that State Creamery contract. She went to bat for me. She saved me my job. She's pretty swell."

Johnny said, "I knew she had a little interest in the business, but I didn't think she had *that* much pull—"

"A *little* money?" Blocky exclaimed. "Listen. Plenty of that gal's dough is invested in this business. I happen to know. What the hell do you think Lou Ward married her for? He never had a dime until a couple years ago."

"He was married once before, wasn't he?"

Blocky nodded. "I think so."

Johnny stood up. He dropped the silver cigarette case back into his pocket. "Is there anyway you can find out if Estelle Ward was at home last night?" he asked his friend.

The red-headed truck driver thought a moment. "I might ask Joe Kelcey. He and Irma live right out there next door to Estelle Ward's. He's my brother-in-law."

"Do that," said Johnny. "Where can I reach you later?"

"I'll be home. I've got to get some sleep."

"All right." Johnny turned up his collar, stepped toward the door. "I've got to meet Sue. I'll call you."

He ducked out before the drivers playing the pin-ball machine could hail him and start asking questions.

OUTSIDE there was a *hush-hush* sound of steadily falling snow. It was piling up in little drifts along the curbs. Street lamps had already been turned on and people hurried through the storm, heads bent down against the driving curtain of white. He wondered how bad the storm was east of here, in the mountains. Of course there would be snow-removal equipment in operation on the Turnpike; the State tried to keep the super-highway open at all times. Johnny had pushed a highway transport through raging snowstorms in the past. He hoped there would be no sleet or ice.

He had just reached the corner when a car horn sounded behind him. He swung. Sue was waving to him from the open window. "Johnny!"

Flakes of white touched her bright-colored face, and he thought she was beautiful. She was riding with Mrs. Slater, who was the woman who ran the farm-boarding house out behind Midway, on the Turnpike.

"I was just starting back to the terminal," Johnny said, as the car pulled up to the curb.

Sue had packages piled on her lap. "Mrs. Slater picked me up at the store and we were just going back to meet you, Johnny."

The woman behind the wheel looked at Johnny and said, "Now you see where your money is going to go." He smiled.

Mrs. Slater was a thin, flat-chested woman in her late forties. She had almost stringy gray hair and her somewhat gaunt face showed the results of a life of hard work.

She said, "I thought you two might like to use the car for a little while, as long as you don't have to leave right on time tonight. I have to meet someone at the hotel. You can leave me off there and pick me up before six."

Johnny was thinking about the storm. "Don't you think you and Sue ought to get started back? It's getting— "

Sue caught his eye. "Darling, I have a couple more things I'd like to pick up." Seated to the right of Mrs. Slater, the woman could not see Sue's expression. There seemed to be more she wanted to tell him. He thought her face was just a trifle pale.

He said, "Well—if you don't mind," looking at Mrs. Slater. He crowded into the coupé with them and the woman drove toward the hotel. It was dark now. Traffic moved carefully through the streets.

Johnny slid behind the wheel as Mrs. Slater got out of the car at the hotel. "Don't hurry," she said, smiling. She moved off through the storm.

And Sue said, "Estelle Ward wants to see you. Right away." She sounded breathless. "That's why I wanted the car!"

Johnny said, "I've got a clever wife. We ought to go places together." And then he looked at her sharply and said, "Where did you see Estelle Ward?"

"She was just getting into her car down by the dime store, almost a half hour ago. She said she *had* to see you, Johnny, and she suggested that we run out to her house.

She seemed terribly upset about something."

He told her about Estelle Ward's attempt to speak to him at the terminal office. "There's something she knows."

"What do you imagine it is, darling?"

JOHNNY sighed. He put the car in gear and they started off through the night. "I wish I knew," he said. "This thing is getting more involved all the time. I don't like it, hon." And he added, "In fact, I don't like going out there to her house."

Sue remarked brightly, "It's all right. I'm with you."

"Pappy's little helper."

"Exactly. Besides, she's a blonde!"

And then Sue put her hand fondly on his arm, and said seriously, "I would have tried to locate you right away, to tell you Estelle Ward wanted you to come out there, only I had to wait for Mrs. Slater. I had told her I'd meet her at the dime store."

"It only takes a couple of minutes to get there," Johnny said.

It was a residential street on the edge of the village, less than a five-minute drive from the hotel. Occasional street lamps made halo-like pools of light in the steadily falling snow. In the scattered homes lights were turned on in kitchens, and it was the hour when housewives were preparing evening dinners. Sue's sweet face turned toward him.

"It makes me think of Christmas, darling."

"Maybe we'll have a home like that some day," he murmured.

"Yes," Sue said quietly, and her voice was dreamy.

Johnny recognized the house at the end of the block, set off by itself. There was a driveway beside the house, with a double garage in the rear. Johnny indicated the car parked in the drive and said, "That's her Zephyr. She's home." He eased into the curb.

She said, "I'll wait."

"And freeze?" Johnny reprimanded her. "Come on."

They followed footprints up the front walk that were already almost filled with snow. There was a wide front veranda, with windows that faced upon the porch. Shades had been drawn, but light shone behind them.

They rang the bell and waited. Sue was shivering a little. There was no answer.

Sue commented, "That's odd. I told her we'd be out as soon as possible.

Johnny rang again, waited. And Sue, with a woman's curiosity, stepped across the porch, bent down so that her eyes were on the level with the bottom of one of the shades. A sliver of light came through beneath the shade.

"Now look, kitten—" Johnny started to protest.

"Johnny!"

Sue clung to him, and she was shivering, only this time it was not from the cold.

V

HIS wife just stood there, pointing at the bottom of the window shade. "Johnny, look!" she said faintly.

He was bending down, peering beneath the bottom of the shade. He saw Estelle Ward in a crumpled heap on the living-room rug, her butter-colored blonde hair tumbled about her head. She was lying very still.

And beside him, Sue was saying breathlessly, "Johnny! We've got to *do* something!"

"Yes," he said tightly. He did the first thing that occurred to him. He tried the two windows that faced him. They were both locked.

Sue was saying, "Maybe she's—"

"Steady," he said gently, and moved again toward the door. He grasped the knob, and was surprised when the door sprang open beneath his shove. He stared

at Sue and she stared at him, and they moved stiffly within the house.

Johnny tramped snow across the hallway carpet. He remembered later that there were wet tracks already on the rugs. His and Sue's were added to them. He spun through the archway into the wide living room, dropped to one knee beside the still form.

Behind him, Sue gasped, "Johnny, she's —dead!"

He was bent close. Estelle Ward was lying on her back, her slim, shapely body twisted. Her eyes were closed, and down across her smooth fine features trickled a rivulet of blood from beneath her waved blonde hair. A heavy fireplace poker was lying near her figure.

He picked up the woman's limp wrist, felt for a pulse. Her features were bloodless. He bent closer, watched her lips.

She's still breathing, he said, and looked up at Sue.

Sue was standing there, taut, fright in her wide gray eyes. At first Johnny thought she was going to faint. And then she did an eloquent thing.

She walked steadily across the room to the hallway, picked up the phone off the table just outside the doorway. "Get me the police department right away," she said in a firm voice.

Afterward it seemed that people had started pouring into the house within two or three minutes after Sue had called. Mark Kirgan, the county detective, was there; and there was the ambulance doctor and other police and neighbors. The living room was jammed.

Johnny had waited with Sue in the kitchen. She had thought she was going to be ill, but now she was all right. Kirgan found them out there a few moments later.

The big county detective closed the hallway door behind him as he came into the room. He sat down, and he looked at them, and then he ran his hand wearily through his slate-gray hair.

"She's got one chance in a hundred," he said.

Sue shuttered. "A fracture?" she asked.

Kirgan nodded. "They've rushed her to the hospital. They'll do everything they can.

"Heavens!" Sue cried. "Someone ought to call her husband—

"I did," said the county detective. "I was with Lou Ward up until two minutes before you called Headquarters. He had just gone back to the office. He's on his way to the hospital now."

He looked at Johnny. "You said she asked you to stop out here?"

"I met her, and she asked me to tell Johnny," Sue explained.

Johnny said, "Up until now, every one has had the idea that the stranger I picked up last night was murdered because of that recent attempted truck hi-jacking. That's your own theory, isn't it, Kirgan?"

"Something like that."

"Well, I don't agree with you." Johnny made a motion with his hands. "I'll admit I've held back a couple of things. *I'm* the one that's in the center of this mystery, and I haven't liked it. I wanted to find out a few things for myself, because I don't agree with that hi-jacking theory." He reached inside his jacket pocket and passed the detective the cigarette case. "I guess I should have told you about this."

In answer to the question in Kirgan's dark, sharp eyes, Johnny told about finding the cigarette case behind the seat of his cab, how he had learned that Estelle Ward had been seen with the stranger who was believed to be a soldier.

Johnny frowned. "I didn't like to think that she was responsible for—well, for what happened last night. And now this! It proves that she was innocent. Otherwise, why has someone tried to kill *her?*"

Kirgan nodded. "There were no prints on that poker. Whoever used it wore gloves."

Johnny lighted a cigarette. He moved restlessly up and down the room. An

electric kitchen clock indicated almost 5:30. It was time to be getting back to the track terminal. "There were some scuffed prints in the snow on the front walk. Naturally Sue and I didn't think anything about trampling them as we came in here. We didn't know, then—"

"Of course not," said Kirgan. He put his big hands on his knees, thought a moment, then got to his feet. "All I can do is go down there to the hospital and wait. Maybe she can tell me who did it when she regains consciousness—if she ever does!"

Sue gave a little cry. "Oh!"

Johnny said, "Let's get the hell out of here."

IT WAS still snowing. People milled around outside the house on the sidewalk, talking, staring in curious fascination at the lighted windows. Johnny heard a neighbor speak to a man and he heard the man's name. He said to Sue, "Wait in the car, kitten," and went over to speak to the man.

"Aren't you Blocky Edwards' brother-in-law?"

The man nodded.

"Did he call you up within the last hour, or was he out here? I was supposed to see him."

The neighbor said, "You're Johnny Rogers, aren't you?"

Johnny nodded.

"He was out here just before"—he jerked his hand in the direction of Estelle Ward's house—"just before this happened. He was asking about last night." He motioned toward the house behind them again. "About her."

Johnny waited.

"She was home all evening," the man announced.

Johnny murmured a quick thanks and went back to the car. He turned the car around and they headed back toward town. He asked, "Has Mrs. Slater got chains for this bus?"

"They're in the back." Sue was silent a moment. Then, "Johnny, what were you asking that man back there?"

"Nothing," he said. "We'll stop past the garage and have someone put those chains on. Then you'd better pick up Mrs. Slater and get started." He was worried. "Maybe it would be better if you stayed in Irwin overnight. You can use my room at the hotel."

Sue looked at him and smiled. "And miss seeing you at Midway when you roll through? I should say not. A fine wife of a road driver I'd make! Besides, I think driving in the snow is fun. There's something about driving through the night—"

He laughed. "Baby, you and I must have been born in the back seat of a Ford!"

He tried to put that picture of Estelle Ward, lying there on the floor so silently, out of his mind. He had a tough haul ahead of him yet tonight, just a job that was part of a road driver's daily program. He found himself tense and upset. He had to snap out of it.

They reached the garage and Johnny hurried inside to call a mechanic. He chatted with Sue while the chains were being put on the wheels. When the man had finished, Johnny was gripping Sue's slim hands.

"Be careful, pet. You'd better eat dinner before you start."

Sue said, "I'll pick up Mrs. Slater and we'll get started. I think we'll eat out on the Turnpike, at the Laurel Hill stop. Maybe we could meet you there."

"Swell," said Johnny. "I'll look for you there, then." He watched her drive off, then turned to the mechanic. "What time is No. 10 getting in from Chicago?"

The man told Johnny, "He rolled through Pittsburg just a few minutes ago. We were talking to the garage down there on the phone. He ought to be here within half an hour."

No. 10 was Johnny Rogers' relay unit for Philadelphia. Ordinarily, he'd be pulling out of here at five-thirty, to roll into

Philly sometime around dawn tomorrow morning. Tonight was different. Lord knew when he'd get through!

He waited until the mechanic had ducked back into the garage, knocking snow from his coat collar, then swung and headed toward a drug store located just down the street. He had some time yet. He was thinking about what Blocky Edwards' brother-in-law had told him. Blocky had left out there just a few minutes before he himself had arrived at Estelle Ward's house. Just a few minutes—

He had ignored Sue's question about talking to Blocky's brother-in-law. He tried to ignore the question that burned through his own thoughts now. He didn't want to think thoughts like this about a friend, and yet——

Johnny plodded into the store, shook the snow off his cap and stepped into one of the phone booths. He called Blocky's rooming house. The landlady answered.

And the woman told him, "No, he hasn't been in. I haven't seen him at all."

He hung up, standing there a moment staring at the phone. He wondered, suddenly, if Blocky Edwards had told him everything.

IN THE office of Wayburn Freight road jockeys were gathered around an old-fashioned oil stove. Some had just come in off the road. They were warming their hands and swapping news about road conditions. Others were preparing to leave on night hauls to various points. But the conversation, mainly, was about the brutal assault on Lou Ward's wife.

Johnny asked, "What's the latest news?"

One of the drivers shook his head. "Not too good. Lou's still up there. They say she won't regain consciousness for at least twenty-four hours. I guess there's nothing they can do but wait."

Johnny singled out another driver who had just got through from Harrisburg, eastern terminus of the Turnpike. "How does it look, Marty?" he wanted to know.

The heavy-set driver shook his head. His eyes were red-streaked and tired. "Bad," he muttered. "It's piling up faster than the plows can get it off the road."

Johnny was worried. Not about himself, but for Sue. He stepped over to the phone on one of the desks, called his hotel. The clerk there knew Sue. He asked the fellow if she was still there.

"They left ten minutes ago," Johnny was told.

He shouldn't have let her start out! But, at least, there was one thing. As soon as the Chicago unit rolled in he would be on the highway behind them. If Sue and Mrs. Slater got stuck he would be there to help.

Restless, Johnny kept walking to the office window, staring out into the stormy night, watching for the huge trailer job that was due in. When he finally saw the red and green and yellow riding lights of the long trailer swinging the corner, he jumped to the service garage doorway, called out:

"Here she is, Luke! How about getting me out of here?"

Luke Albers, tall and gangling and chewing tobacco, was in charge during Lou Ward's absence. He called a grease-monkey, slipped on a heavy sheepskin, hurried out to meet the huge trailer-unit that was pulling up before the gas pumps. Johnny turned up his leather collar and went out to help them. There were ten huge tires to be checked, two massive gas tanks to be filled, over twenty-five riding lights to be okayed. The sound of the Diesel was a deep, powerful throb. Steam rose up from the hood as the flakes of snow touched it.

The Chicago driver, a wiry young fellow, swung down from the high cab. He handed over the delivery sheets to Johnny, blew out his breath, said, "Anybody that gets into this cockeyed business is nuts!"

Johnny grinned. "Sure. And let them keep you off the road for a week and you'd

be screaming. It gets in your blood, fella."

"Me," said the driver, "I should have been a bookkeeper."

Johnny accompanied him into the office, picked up his trip card, stamped the time on it. He stuffed the delivery sheets into his pocket. "How's she running?" he asked the Chicago driver.

"Like a watch. But you've got a load. Take it easy."

"Sure," said Johnny, and went out.

And a moment later he was up there in the cab, gunning the motor, listening to the sound of it. Smooth. It made you feel good again, the grip of the big steering wheel in your hands, the sense of tremendous power there beneath the huge hood.

Luke gave him the signal and Johnny slipped into the "creeper" gear. He went slowly through the many forward speeds, circled the block, took the cut-off that led to the super-highway. A few moments later he was stopping at the toll gate and picking up his toll card, that would be turned in at the other end of the Turnpike, one hundred and sixty miles away.

Then the lights of the town were behind him and there was nothing but twin wide ribbons of highway stretching out ahead of him in the night. So far, it looked pretty good. Scrapers had cleared the wide one-way lanes. His powerful lights bored through the driving snow. The wiper blades kept up a steady *swick-swack, swick-swack.*

He thought of the woman lying back there in the hospital of the small town. Perhaps she was dying. He thought of the stranger who had been murdered out there at Midway last night, eighty miles away. How were the two crimes connected? Who was behind them?

Johnny kept thinking.

Miles steadily dropped past. So far, the wide swath of highway was clear. Snow plows and scrapers had been through. Once Johnny thundered past a crew of men working on the roads. He blinked his lights, held his speed. He felt sorry for those guys out there in the storm.

Seven miles, and he was rolling past the first station at Hempfield. The little colonial building looked cheery in the night; it was a temptation to stop for a moment. But Sue was somewhere ahead. He had not yet seen Mrs. Slater's coupé. Anxiously Johnny kept his foot on the gas and squinted his eyes against the steady bombardment of snowflakes against his headlamp beams.

It was yet twenty-nine miles to the Laurel Hill station, where Sue had said they'd wait for him. Ordinarily he would have clipped that off in a little over half an hour. Tonight was different.

The road climbed steadily. As yet there were no curves. The mountains were still to come. A truck passed him occasionally on the opposing one-way strip of highway, the driver wig-wagging his lights. But after a while Johnny noted that the transports coming through from the east were getting fewer and fewer. Then, for five lonely miles, he did not meet a single one. Something was wrong up there ahead. There must be a tie-up.

It was growing constantly colder, and there was some wind. On the higher ridges, where the Turnpike was exposed to the sweep of the storm, wind had swept the roadway clear. It left sheet-like stretches of iced pavement.

Nerves tingled in Johnny's finger-tips as he handled the wheel deftly. You could feel the slight sway and pull of the heavily loaded trailer behind the cab. One careless movement on that steering wheel—and the huge trailer would jack-knife around you. He had seen a trailer job jack-knife on a long downgrade once. The driver had been trapped with his foot caught beneath the clutch pedal as the transport rolled over an embankment and caught fire. You didn't forget scenes like that!

The motor was laboring now. Johnny

dropped into one of the lower speeds. He was approaching the Laurel Hill Tunnel and the first mountain. Twenty-four hundred feet. He felt the cracking in his ears. A few moments later he was thundering into the tunnel itself. It offered a brief relaxation for his strained eyes, out of the snowstorm. The bright blue-green mercury lights gave daylight glow.

Then he shot out into the storm again. Ahead lay two miles of downgrade to the Laurel Hill Station. One of the fire crash trucks usually stored in the garage at each tunnel was parked in the open sweep of roadway. It was a grim reminder.

But the downgrade had been sanded. Johnny let her roll.

And then the bright lights of the station loomed up on the right and shortly he was rolling along the deceleration lane. He rolled to a stop in the truck parking area. Mrs. Slater's coupé was probably parked behind the long, low building in the motorists' parking area. Several highway maintenance trucks were drawn up in the station.

Johnny spoke to a driver of one of the snow trucks as he moved quickly toward the lunchroom doorway. "How's it beyond here? How come no trailer jobs are coming through?"

The man was buttoning the collar of his heavy sheepskin. He looked tired. He said, "A couple big jobs skidded on one of the hills between here and Somerset, on the westbound side. They've got the road blocked."

"Anyone hurt?"

"I don't think so."

Johnny continued on inside, passed through the pine-paneled lobby and into the brightly colored lunch counter section of the station. A waitress behind the counter recognized him. She said, "I have a note here for you." She reached beneath the counter.

"A note?"

"Your wife left it."

Johnny ordered coffee and a sandwich, sat down on a stool, opened the message that Sue had left for him. It read:

Darling:

Mrs. Slater thinks we ought to hurry on. She wants to get to Midway before it gets too bad. I'll see you there.

SUE.

Well, he thought, perhaps it was just as well. The quicker Mrs. Slater got home and off the roads, the better.

Johnny was just finishing his sandwich, impatient to be on his way again, when the waitress approached him. "There's a telephone call for you," she said. "From Irwin. Some man named Edwards is trying to reach you—"

Johnny jerked to his feet. Blocky! What could Blocky Edwards want?

The girl indicated the single phone booth out in the lobby and Johnny hurried that way. He closed the door behind him and listened to Blocky's taut, strained voice over the wire.

"Johnny?"

"What's wrong, Blocky?" Johnny said. "I tried to locate you before I left Irwin, and you weren't around."

"Listen," Blocky cut him off. "I can't go into all the details now. But I was out there to her house—"

"Who?"

"Estelle Ward's. I talked to her after my brother-in-law told me she was at home all last evening. And she told me who that guy was that got knocked off in your truck last night!"

"Who was he?" Johnny was tense.

"A private detective, working out of Pittsburgh. Estelle Ward had hired him!"

"Why?"

"She wouldn't tell me. But I've found out something just the same. I've got in touch with the Pittsburgh office of the agency that employed him. They said something about locating a woman named Mary Collins, somewhere out near Midway."

"Yes?" Johnny said quickly. "Mary Collins was the person Sue had mentioned, but whom she'd been unable to locate."

"Listen, Johnny," Blocky Edwards was saying. "I had to duck. That's why you couldn't reach me. Imagine! Estelle Ward was almost murdered by someone right after I left her house. I'd left a pack of cigarettes lying around there. I figured that county dick—Mark Kirgan—would nail me. I didn't have any time to spare. I didn't want to be tied up with a lot of questions. I wanted to find out about this other thing."

Johnny said, "Nice work, kid. Now get this. Here's what you do: You're pretty friendly with that kid down at the office, aren't you—I mean, that bookkeeper?"

"Well, fairly so. She and I had a date one night."

"Okay, then," said Johnny. "Go see her at her home. Right now! She just came to work for Wayburn Freight recently. I'm playing a hunch. See what you can get out of her. Then I'll call you from the New Baltimore Station. I'll try to push through to there within the next hour. Where can I reach you?"

Blocky Edwards told him, "I'll leave word with the local operator here where I can be reached."

"Good," said Johnny. A moment later he hung up.

AND then it was the storm and the cold and the lonely night again. In little hamlets far off the great Turnpike people were safe and warm in their homes. Many would already be in bed. But out here in the blizzard-swept night a road driver clutched a huge steering wheel, and his jaw set grimly, because ahead of him somewhere, in the mountains, was a girl he loved. His wife. Two people, surrounded by something that was even far worse than the dangers of the stormy night. Death! There was no telling where it might strike next!

Johnny stared fiercely ahead into the night, seldom losing speed, alert every instant. It was one of the traits that made him a valued driver. In all his experience he had never cracked up a cargo.

The highway was still fairly clear. One or two private cars had passed him. Snow trucks had been through ahead of him. But the wind, howling across the ridges, piled up flat, low drifts that he came upon unexpectedly, and which offered a constant menace. Plowing into one of those six-inch drifts with the front wheels was almost enough to rip the steering wheel out of his hands. Sheer weight and momentum took him through, until he reached the cleared stretches again.

Somehow, Johnny had the feeling that the solution to murder was going to be found out here on the Turnpike, near Midway. A woman named Mary Collins. What did she know? Where was she?

Johnny forgot his aching shoulder muscles and the pain that was constantly in his back, from fighting the twisting steering wheel. He had to get through. He *had* to!

He passed Somerset, the station far across the Turnpike on the westbound lane. He started the long climb to Allegheny Tunnel. Then he was plunging through, the summit of the Allegheny Mountains over four hundred feet above his head. The rumbling transport dropped toward the valley beyond. Sheltered by forests, the road was fairly clear of snow. He picked up speed.

And when he finally rolled into the New

Baltimore Station he saw a dozen big units lined up in the parking lanes. Through the frosted windows of the lunchroom he could see drivers seated at the counter. Several hailed him as he came in. He looked around for Sue or Mrs. Slater.

He was told by one of the drivers, "They were here, Johnny. But they decided to drive on through to Midway."

Johnny frowned. "Why aren't *you* guys pushing through?"

Several shook their heads. "The roads are blocked *beyond* Midway," someone said. "There isn't a chance."

They were joking, enjoying themselves. A gypsy—an independent driver in business for himself—remarked cheeerfully, "This is the first chance I've had to knock off in months. And, boy, is it good! I'm just going to sit here and eat!"

Johnny was worried about Sue. But first he had to call Blocky Edwards. Maybe he'd even call Sue, too. He'd feel better if he could speak to her and know that she was safely at the big station halfway across the Turnpike.

From the telephone booth in the lobby —each station was identical in layout—he called the Irwin local operator and gave Blocky Edwards' name. The girl said, "Just a moment, please. I can connect you."

A moment later Blocky was on the line. He sounded excited. "Guess what's happened?" he cried.

"What?"

"Lou Ward's disappeared!"

VI

THERE was a thoughtful frown on Johnny Rogers' brow as he listened to his friend's words. Blocky was saying, "He was there at the hospital until about an hour ago. Then word came through that his wife—Estelle—was going to be all right. It seems they rushed some specialist out here from Pittsburgh. She hasn't regained consciousness yet, but she's going to pull through."

"But what about Lou Ward?" prodded Johnny.

"About an hour ago he left the hospital and no one's seen him since! They can't locate him any place. I've been talking to Kirgan, that county dick. I explained to him where I was. He's a pretty swell guy."

"I know," Johnny interrupted impatiently. "But about this other thing. You are positive Lou Ward isn't around town?"

"Sure of it. Listen! I've found out something else. I've talked to Elsie, the bookkeeper at the office, like you asked."

Johnny waited.

"Your hunch was right. She replaced that other girl for a purpose. *Estelle Ward herself hired her!* The girl told me that funds have been disappearing from various accounts. Estelle Ward was worried about it. Along with that trouble with trucks being hi-jacked a couple times—there were a couple we didn't even know about, Elsie says—there was this business about something being phoney with the books. Records had been tampered with! That's why Estelle Ward had this private detective investigating. I'm telling you it's something to do with that woman named Mary Collins. That's why the guy was probably out there hanging around Midway."

THINGS that had occurred to Johnny Rogers were being verified. But there was still one thing that did not connect up. He passed it up momentarily, asked instead, "Lou Ward was married once before, wasn't he?"

"That's right," said Blocky.

"Do you know who the woman was?"

"No."

Johnny thought, then suggested, "See Kirgan, then. He can get some information at City Hall. And hurry! It's important that we find out as soon as—"

"Wait a minute!" Blocky said. "I can't reach Kirgan. He's already left here. He's in a State trooper car on the way out there now."

"How come?"

"To try and find Mary Collins."

Johnny was tense. He shouted into the phone, "You've *got* to get me that information. Drag somebody down to City Hall. Have them check the records. Step on it!"

"Johnny, listen—"

"And then call the State trooper barracks out here and have them relay the information to Officer Gordon Strang. Gordy's a good friend of mine. He's usually on the patrol between here and Midway. Tell them to have Gordy pick me up between here and Midway."

"Okay, kid," said Blocky. "But what I'm trying to tell you—I think I've got this thing figured out! "

"You've got *what* figured out?" Johnny demanded.

"The murder of that private investigator last night and the assault on Estelle Ward this afternoon. I remember you said Lou Ward left Midway while you were still busy helping those wheel-grippers fixing that cylinder head. Lou Ward was *alone* as he went back past your truck, Johnny.

"He had every chance in the world to knock off that guy. Lou, I've found out, was chiseling in the business. Using his wife's own funds. That private detective was investigating. He had found out something. So—bingo! Lou let him have it!"

Johnny was still frowning as he listened to Blocky's words. He said calmly, "Part of that fits together perfectly. Just like a puzzle. But you've overlooked another angle."

"What?"

"Lou Ward was with Kirgan, the county detective, at the time his wife was assaulted this afternoon."

"Who told you that?"

"Kirgan himself."

"Well, I'll be—" Blocky started, but Johnny interrupted him again.

"Now get that information and get in touch with me somehow. Have them flash Gordy Strang. He'll find me on the road somewhere."

Johnny hung up, jiggled the hook until he got operator, paid his extra time charges, then said, "I want to get the North Midway Restaurant on the Turnpike. It's important. Please hurry."

Because, suddenly, he was thinking of a little remark Sue had made to him at their wedding party last week, something that now took on vital significance. That, and another thing she had said this afternoon, when he had met her.

He could be right. And if he was—Sue was in grave danger. *He had to reach her.*

And the operator was saying, "I'm sorry, sir. The storm has affected the service to North Midway Station. I can't reach them."

Johnny's heart thudded. "You've got to," he half shouted. "You've got to get a call through."

"I'm sorry," the girl said patiently, "but the lines are down. Temporarily, there is nothing we can do."

Johnny hung up, and there was a tightness in his chest.

Sue, he thought. *Sue! I've got to reach you!*

OTHER road drivers stared at Johnny Rogers as he swung through the lunchroom.

"Hey! You're not going to try and drive any further tonight, are you?" someone asked in amazement.

Johnny snapped, "It's only seventeen miles to Midway. I'll get through." He couldn't tell them everything he knew. They wouldn't believe him. The whole idea was almost too fantastic. He wasn't even sure of it himself—yet.

He grabbed a driver's arm, said, "You know Gordy Strang, the trooper, don't you?"

The truck driver nodded.

"Tell him what time I left here if he

should come in. Tell him I'm going on through to Midway."

"Hey! What's up, Johnny?"

He said, "Plenty," and swung out into the stormy night.

Later, he didn't recall much about that drive through the night. Snow was now piling up faster on the highway than the plows could keep it cleared. It hammered against the windshield until Johnny thought he could not watch it another instant. It had a hypnotic, blinding effect. His eyes burned fiercely in their sockets.

But he held to the bucking steering wheel, and there were times when he wondered if he were on the pavement or not. But courage and grim determination saw him through; that, and something else. Thoughts of the lovely girl who was his wife.

HE WAS on the last sweeping curve into Midway when the white-painted State police car rolled up behind him, its siren a banshee sound in the storm.

The trooper driving the car was tall, wedge-shouldered Gordy Strang. Johnny had known him for almost two years now. He drew up, stuck his head through the open cab window as the big State trooper came running up.

"I got your message," Strang yelled up at him. "Blocky Edwards called the barracks from Irwin."

"What'd he find out?"

"Nothing—yet. But he said something about your wife, Sue—"

Johnny jerked his head. The trooper knew Sue. Many a night the three of them had sat around a table here in Midway when Johnny had made his regular stop on the way through.

Johnny said, "I'm worried about her, Gordy. She might be in trouble." He motioned across to the wide sweep of road to the smaller station that was the North Midway stop. On this side, just ahead, was the large two-story South Midway structure, largest unit on the Turnpike. "I tried to phone her, but the lines were down. She should have reached there—"

"Come on!" said the trooper. "Pull up into the station. We'll use the underpass."

A number of transports were stopped in the South Midway station. There were sleeping quarters here for truck jockeys. But none of them were sleeping now.

A gas station attendant told Johnny as he swung down from the high cab, "Everyone's down beyond here. One of the Silver Fleet trucks went over. Got the road blocked. They're working on it now."

The State trooper had pulled up beside Johnny's truck and now joined him. They hurried toward the underground passageway that led beneath the Turnpike to the North Midway station.

Strang wanted to know, "Why do you figure Sue's in danger, Johnny?"

They were running through the long underground tunnel. Johnny said, "You've heard what happened in Irwin?"

The trooper jerked his head.

"Well, Lou Ward was married once before. This first wife of his—I have a hunch she's out here. That's the verification I was waiting to hear from Blocky Edwards."

"But—"

"I'm afraid this woman is going to figure that Sue knows something. I've got to *stop* that woman, Gordy. She's dangerous!"

They had reached the stairs leading up into the restaurant-gas station. They swung through the lunchroom. Workmen were crowded around the counter. Half-frozen, they had just come in off the snow plows and scrapers.

Johnny singled out a girl he knew who was working behind the counter.

"Where's Sue?"

"She and Mrs. Slater were in here about half an hour ago," the girl said. "They've gone down to the farm."

"Who else is down there?"

The waitress shook her head. "No one, I guess." She indicated the crowded room.

"Everyone's on duty because of the men working on the roads. They—"

Johnny didn't wait to hear anymore. He grabbed the big trooper's arm, urged him through a doorway at the rear of the big room. They cut through the kitchens of the station, took a short cut across the rear parking area. They reached the path beyond the gate in the high wire fence. There was almost a foot of snow, and Johnny had to squint against the flakes that were still falling steadily.

But he saw the footprints. Someone had been along here. He quickened his pace, running, the trooper directly behind him. Fear was a cold hand that gripped Johnny's pounding heart.

Finally, ahead, light glowed through the white storm. It was the large farm-boarding house where Sue and other employees of the Midway station lived. It struck Johnny that just within a few more days they would have been established in their own little apartment in Irwin, where she would have been safe. Safe!

As they swung through an open gate that led up to the steps of the big rambling house, Johnny noted that scuffed foot tracks led *away* as well as into the house. Someone had come out again and headed down the country road that led past here. He remembered what Sue had told him about the woman named Mary Collins, who lived almost a half mile down the road.

Johnny jerked open the front door. A dim night light glowed near the foot of the stairs leading to the second floor.

"Sue!"

There was nothing but silence in the house. Gordon Strang looked at Johnny significantly, then started through the lower-floor rooms, turning on lights.

Johnny hurried up the stairs to the second floor. Her room was up here at the back of the hall.

"Sue!"

He ran along the hall, and then was pounding on her door.

"Sue!"

He grasped the doorknob, found it unlocked and flung into the room. Her light was turned on. The place was in immaculate order. He saw the note propped up on her dresser. The note that read:

> Johnny:
>
> In case you come here looking for me . . . I've gone down to Mary Collins'. I've *got* to find her. Will be back. . . .

Will be back. *Would* she? Johnny met the trooper in the upstairs hallway as he ran out of the room. "Come on!" he said.

They followed the tracks along the country road. The deep snow slowed their progress. Johnny thought of Sue, struggling along here in the cold. What a courageous child!

The half mile seemed like ten. He recalled that Sue had said it was the only farmhouse near them. It was a small place, looking forlorn and dismal in the storm. And—it was in darkness! Johnny's nerves went taut.

But he clung to hope as they approached the house. Perhaps he had made a mistake. Maybe there was another farm further along.

But here were the foot tracks, and they led through the gate. The State trooper was leading the way. Abruptly he touched the truck driver's arm, drew up short, said, "Wait a minute."

A tall, thin woman was coming down the steps of the porch. She came quickly toward them. It was gaunt, flat-chested Mrs. Slater.

The woman said breathlessly, "Sue came down here, and I was worried when she didn't return on time. So I followed." She spread her large, mitten-covered hands. "But there's no one here. No one at all!"

She motioned back up the road. "She must have gone directly back to Midway, to wait for you, Mr. Rogers. Maybe we'll find her—"

And Johnny snapped, "The hell she did!" He seized Mrs. Slater's arms. "Hold her, Gordy!"

At the same time, Johnny was looking toward the darkened house. Anxiety was in his sharp blue eyes. The trooper was saying, puzzled, "I don't get this, Johnny."

"I might be wrong," said Johnny, "but I doubt it. Mrs. Slater is the person who assaulted Estelle Ward this afternoon, in Irwin. She is the one who—"

At Johnny's statement, the woman tensed. There was hardness in her thin arms. She tried to tear loose from his grasp.

The trooper took over, his jaw setting grimly. He held the woman and said sharply to Johnny, "Take a look in the house."

Johnny Rogers found his wife lying on a parlor sofa, bound hand and foot.

VII

SUE was on her feet again, clinging to Johnny, her wide gray eyes bright with fright. "Johnny," she sobbed. "Johnny, it was horrible. I thought—she was going to kill me!"

He held her slim figure against him a moment. He said gently, "I don't think so, kitten. I don't think she planned to do that."

The house was intensely cold. There was no heat.

Sue was shivering against him, striving to regain control of herself. Johnny said, "We've got to get you some place where it's warm." He was aware that his trooper friend had entered the door behind him, was waiting there with Mrs. Slater. The woman glared, her face set in a stony mask.

Sue's fright had passed. She suddenly tugged at Johnny's arm. "She must be here. She *must* be, Johnny."

"Who?"

"Mary Collins! I came down here to look for her again. Mrs. Slater followed me, grabbed me."

Sue started through the house, still talking. "A while ago I thought I heard a thumping sound. From upstairs. I was just going to go up there when Mrs. Slater came in—"

"Okay, pet, okay," Johnny said. He went on ahead. Upstairs there were two small bedrooms. Johnny lit oil lamps, flung open closet doors. In the second bedroom they found a woman lying huddled in the closet.

She was tied hand and foot, as Sue had been tied, and there was a handkerchief gag in her mouth. She had kept from freezing in the unheated house by somehow pulling clothes and coats down around her body. They spent moments releasing her.

"You're Mary Collins?" asked Johnny.

The woman nodded. Her teeth chattered, and she said, "That woman—Mrs. Slater—"

Sue's arm went worriedly around her. "Don't try to talk, darling. Wait'll we get you something hot to drink." She looked at Johnny. "There's a coal stove in the kitchen. We'll get a can of soup or something heated."

He nodded. Both of them had been rubbing Mary Collins' arms. They wrapped a blanket around her. They helped her downstairs.

Footsteps were thudding across the porch. Several State troopers were entering the small hallway. One said, "We got a call to follow you here, Strang—"

Johnny's friend was still watching the Slater woman. Johnny spoke to him quickly, "Have them wait out here a few moments."

He and Sue took Mary Collins back to the kitchen. Johnny started building a fire in the coal range. Sue was locating things in a pantry. They watched color flow back into Mary Collins' face as she ate hot broth a few moments later.

She was a middle-aged, dark-haired

woman. Under the right conditions she could have been fairly attractive. She told them, "No, I was not his sister. But I knew Walter for a number of years. We were good friends." She looked steadily at Johnny and said, "He's dead, isn't he?"

She was referring to the private detective who had been stabbed to death in the cab of his truck last night.

Johnny nodded. "What was his name?"

"Walter Grant. He had been out here for several days, quietly investigating. He let people think he was a soldier, on furlough. Last night he said he had gathered all the information he needed. He was going back to Irwin." She stood up, moved across the room to a shelf over the range, took down a curved stem pipe. She continued in a strained voice, "He had forgotten this. I hurried up to Midway to catch him. They told me he had already left with you. I didn't know, then, that he was there in your truck—" Her voice faltered.

Sue exclaimed, "Then *you* must have been the woman who hurried past me last night in the darkness, up there in the lane!"

Mary Collins nodded.

Johnny said, "Mrs. Slater was Lou Ward's first wife, isn't that right?"

"Yes." Mary Collins sat down again, took a sip out of a cup of hot tea. "She came down here early this morning. She started to question me about Walter's—murder last night. She suspected I knew something. I was getting ready to leave here, to go to Irwin, when she grabbed me." She looked across the table at Sue. "I heard you down here this morning. I heard you calling my name. It was terrible. I was there in the closet—and there was nothing I could do!"

Johnny prodded gently, "What else do you know about Mrs. Slater?"

"This," said Mary Collins. She was still trembling a little. "Her marriage to Lou Ward was an unhappy one. It was a life of hard work. Drudgery. She left him. They were never divorced."

Sue looked at Johnny and he looked at his wife. Sue's lovely face was pale and strained.

The woman continued. "Her name is really *Miss* Slater. It is her maiden name. When she took over that boarding house, in order to make a living, she pretended that she was married, because of business reasons." Mary Collins' gaze went from Sue to Johnny. "I cannot feel anything against her. Unless—it's a pity. She loved Lou Ward. When he married again, when he married Estelle, who had money, that love changed to hate. Sometimes, there's only a thin thread of difference, you know."

Johnny nodded.

"Well, she saw Lou Ward become successful in business. She felt that she was entitled to some of that success. And so, Mrs. Slater was blackmailing him."

Sue exclaimed, "Blackmail!"

And Johnny added, "Remember last week at our wedding party, kitten, when you made a remark about Mrs. Slater once knowing Lou Ward? You said she told you that she had met him once when he was in some trouble?"

Sue nodded, staring.

"I asked Blocky Edwards about it. He knew, though he has never told anyone. Lou Ward was in an accident quite a few years ago. His wife—Mrs. Slater—was the only witness to that accident. A child was hurt. Lou's wife would not testify against him, and he got out of a lawsuit."

Mary Collins' dark eyes were somber. She nodded at Johnny's statement. "That's right," she agreed. "So when Lou Ward began making money, with his second wife's—Estelle—help, Mrs. Slater was insanely jealous and bitter. She was really still married to Lou Ward, you know. She threatened him with this, and that old accident case that still hung over him, and which she could drag out into the open again."

"So Lou Ward paid off!" said Johnny.

"Exactly." Mary Collins shook her head. "His second wife, Estelle, was putting plenty of money into the business—and he was bleeding it out just as fast. He needed more money. He hit upon this scheme of having some of the trucks hijacked and some of the more valuable cargo stolen. Walter learned that there were two holdups that were successful. They were hushed up. That's why no one ever heard about them. But I think we've got the men responsible for them in a trap."

Johnny stared, amazed.

"Yesterday," said Mary Collins, "Walter mailed a letter to Mark Kirgan, in Irwin, giving him the names of the two men there who were working for Lou Ward. They'll be caught." The woman looked at Johnny. "But do you know, a peculiar thing has happened."

"What's that?" asked Johnny. Sue was listening intently.

"This morning, when Mrs. Slater came down here early, a change had come over her. I said there is a thin thread of difference between love and hate. Well, when she learned about that murder last night, she was suddenly worried about Lou Ward. She wanted to help him—"

Sue interrupted, "But didn't Mrs. Slater *murder* Walter Grant, that private detective?"

Johnny said quietly, "No, dear, Mrs. Slater didn't murder him. But she did run out there to Estelle Ward's house, this afternoon, while you were busy shopping."

Mary Collins went on. "So Mrs. Slater was worried about that. I knew she had some reason for driving into Irwin today with Sue, here. She wanted to see Estelle Ward to learn just how much the woman knew—"

"And," supplied Johnny, "they got into an argument, and because Mrs. Slater hated Lou's second wife, she hit her with a poker in blind fury and almost killed her."

"That must be it. First, though, she came here this morning and made certain that I wouldn't cause any trouble." She looked at Sue and smiled grimly. "On the way back from Irwin, she must have got worried about *you*. You must have said something—"

Sue said suddenly, "I was worried about you. I kept saying I had to find you—"

Johnny grinned. "No *wonder!*" He added, "That's why she trailed you down here. She had to keep you and Mary out of the way until she saw Lou Ward again—"

Johnny broke off, looked startled, then jumped to his feet. He started to swing toward the front hall when he saw that the kitchen door was open, and that his friend, Gordy Strang, was standing there.

The big State trooper said, "We've heard what you said, Miss Collins." He nodded to another trooper who held a pad and pencil in his hands. "We've taken that down."

Then he motioned to the gaunt, thin-faced woman standing at his side. "And," he finished, "Mrs. Slater has verified it."

Mrs. Slater's face was no longer bleak and grim. She had been crying. Something—hope, perhaps—had gone out of her.

Sue clutched Johnny's arm. She whispered, "I can't feel harshly against her for what she—did to me. She—she still loves Lou Ward, I think!"

Johnny nodded, his eyes somber.

He said softly, "We won't prefer any charges against her."

Then Johnny was saying, "I've got to get to a phone. I've got to try and reach Blocky Edwards, in Irwin!"

Mary Collins told him, "Why, there's a phone here. In the living room."

He hurried in there, called the operator, asked if there was any chance of getting a call through to Irwin. The girl said, "Yes, the lines have been restored. I think I can get you through."

And when the call was finally put

through, Blocky Edwards was there, waiting, exclaiming, "I've been trying to locate you for hours, Johnny! Listen! That guy Lou Ward has blown town, that's what. Kirgan is trying to locate him out on the Turnpike. They figure Lou Ward is following you, Johnny, because you know too much, and because— Say, do you know what I've figured out?" He was almost shouting with excitement.

Johnny said, "Yes. That Lou Ward is the murderer. When he pulled away from Midway last night, alone, he stopped past my truck and recognized that private detective who was sitting there waiting for me. Lou Ward had learned that he had all the evidence against him, and that the man was probably going to report to his wife, Estelle. He was in a spot. So—he killed him."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Blocky. "I thought all along it was Mrs. Slater. "And, say! I've got some other news. Estelle has regained consciousness, Johnny. She isn't as bad as they first thought. I've talked to her, and you know what she has told me—"

Johnny interrupted, "That's swell, Blocky. That's really swell. But I haven't got time to talk now. There's something—"

And he hung up. He was thinking of this statement that his friend had just made on the phone. Lou Ward was out on the Turnpike. He'd had time enough now to reach Midway. Johnny had to get to him!

He singled out big Gordy Strang, said, "Come on. We haven't much time."

Sue wanted to join them, but Johnny said solicitously, "You wait here, kitten. You've been through enough. We'll be back in a little bit."

They hurried out.

IT HAD almost stopped snowing. The night was clear and sharp and cold. Another trooper had joined them. Johnny explained about Lou Ward as they pushed through the snow, past Mrs. Slater's place, then up the lane to the North Midway station.

Just as they rounded the brightly lighted, colonial-style building, they heard a shout echo from far across the Turnpike. Then there was the sound of a shot. It had stopped snowing now. Johnny stared across the road. He saw his truck, the men that were moving around it.

He started running, accompanied by Gordy Strang and the other two State troopers. They cut across the broad expanse of twin highways, were moving toward the huge trailer transport when they saw the big man appear near the rear of the trailer and start a dash toward the woods.

There was another shot, flat and loud in the cold night. Mark Kirgan, the county detective, also appeared behind the trailer, following the running man.

The two troopers ran to his aid.

Johnny paused, noted something about the tire tracks made by the ten huge wheels of his transport. The unit had been moved since he'd left it!

Curious, he traced the tracks, saw where they led to the Turnpike, led across it to the westbound strip. The truck, while he'd been gone, had been moved and brought back.

He had just returned from inspecting the tire tracks in the snow when the two troopers, with Mark Kirgan, returned with their captive.

It was heavy-set, ruddy-faced Lou Ward, the foreman. Ward was handcuffed to one of the troopers. Kirgan said:

"This is what I found on him."

He held out the long-bladed knife, then said, "And I've dug up enough information to make me believe he stabbed that private detective last night!"

Johnny nodded.

Kirgan waved a big hand toward Johnny's semi-trailer unit. "I got here in time to find him fooling around your job there, Rogers. He was up to something.

He was just climbing down out of the cab."

Johnny said, "That truck has been moved." His eyes blazed toward the big terminal foreman. "He must have moved it!"

"That's a lie—" Lou Ward started to mutter.

And Johnny said, "Wait a minute."

He leaped to the cab, was lifting out the front cushion seat. His friend Gordy Strang was standing on the running board, curious at Johnny's action.

Johnny indicated the meter device located beneath the seat. He explained, "When the truck leaves Chicago there is a circular card disk inserted in this meter. It records, on a graph, the complete trip—speed, stops, mileage. It's locked in there and can only be removed when the truck rolls into the Philadelphia terminal—"

Johnny broke off, jaw setting grimly. On a sudden impulse he picked up a wrench and smashed at the meter device. Broke it open. He removed the paper disk and inspected it.

"Here you are!" he said. "This shows that my truck was moved approximately a mile since I parked it here." His sharp eyes were thoughtful. "That would be a half mile each way, and it was driven along the westbound strip of Turnpike. Let's take a look!"

They climbed into a State trooper car with Lou Ward, silent and sullen, still handcuffed to one of the officers. A half-mile back along the Turnpike Johnny had them slow down. Headlamp beams picked up the tire tracks that indicated a truck had been pulled to the side of the cleared road. The tracks were deep in the snow.

Johnny jumped out, followed by Mark Kirgan and his friend Trooper Strang. In a small ravine off to the side of the road they found the three small wooden boxes that had been hidden there.

Johnny noted the manufacturer's name stenciled on the boxes, then remembered the delivery sheets that he still carried tucked inside his windbreaker. He got out the sheets and ran down the list of cargo. Then he whistled sharply.

"Drugs," he said. "Narcotics, too. Worth a small-sized fortune." He stared around at the foreman, still guarded by the other officers. "I guess he was desperate. He thought he could hide that stuff here and pick it up later. He could come back and—"

Mark Kirgan said grimly, "He won't come back from where he's going. Not from prison, you don't."

LATER, Johnny was just hurrying into the North Midway station to pick up some sandwiches to take back to Sue, when Sue herself rushed up to him in the paneled lobby of the restaurant and said breathlessly, "Johnny! Blocky Edwards has been trying to reach you. You shouldn't have hung up so soon. He had something to tell you!"

He wondered why her wide gray eyes were so bright and excited. "Okay, sweets, I'll call him—"

"You don't have to," Sue cried. "He told *me!*"

"Told you what?"

"What he started to tell you before you hung up and cut him off." Sue was holding his arm, trembling with excitement. "He says Estelle Ward talked to him at the hospital. It is her money that practically controls Wayburn Freight now. She says she has watched your record for some time.

"Johnny—she wants you to take full charge there at the terminal in Irwin. Think of it, darling. We can live there all the time, and you won't have to be out on the road at nights, and I'll be with you—"

Johnny was grinning. "All right, kitten. All right. Don't get excited."

But he was so excited himself he could hardly talk. He said, "Say, you know I'm starved. We ought to get something to eat. Well, say!"

In our next issue

FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE

His famous character **"No-Shirt McGee"** spends a hectic Christmas in the North.

WALTER C. BROWN

Flaming fires of the East—and a drama of men's souls

"The Camphorwood Chest"

SIX-GUN GAMBLE

A Western novelette

Edward Parrish Ware

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All in SHORT STORIES, *December 25th.*

The biggest and best magazine in the action and adventure field

All This Social Business in Washington—Well, How About It on the Sidewalks of New York?

A Matter of Protocol

By SEABURY QUINN

WESTLEY drained the final drop of his dry Martini and raised an eyebrow at the hovering waiter. "Another of the same," he ordered, "and don't spare the horses."

It was good to be back in New York after an eight months tour of duty in Washington. The wartime capital was a small town racked with growing pains complicated by dementia præcox. Here was sanity, stability, reality. Through a gap in the close-clipped hedge that fenced the café from the sidewalk he looked appreciatively after a bare-legged girl in a gray man-tailored flannel suit, a small black hat and white crêpe blouse with a little mauve tie at her slim throat. H'm. Not bad. Not bad at all.

The second double dry Martini seldom tastes as good as the first, but this one did. The vermouth cut the flavor of the gin with surgical exactitude, snipping off the roughness without impairing the dryness.

As he raised his glass for a second sip he became aware of her. She must have been there all along, and how he'd missed her was something to lose sleep over, for she was certainly a four-wheeled honey.

Honey was right. A froth of honey-colored hair turbaned in a twist of scarlet silk, skin tanned an even, absolutely golden hue, slim blond brows so sun-bleached they seemed almost silver, and under them the gleam of ice-blue Nordic eyes. Her dress of natural Shantung flattened against contours to make Aphrodite envious, and the red of her headcloth, her lips, her fingertips and the tips of the unstockinged toes just visible between the meshes of her woven-leather sandals matched exactly.

Two days of unexpired leave stretched between Westley and his desk at the War Department; he was ready for diversion as a sailor after six months on the ocean, but when she smiled at him with a smile neither amused nor detached he had a feeling as if something like small red ants were running up his spine and across his neck, for her seductiveness hit him like a knotted fist. He half rose, started to sit down again, then, as her eyes teased him from behind their heavy lashes, stepped with a feeling of incipient vertigo toward her table.

"Bon jour, mon capitaine," she greeted. The tanned, long-fingered hand she extended was cool and firm with the firmness that comes from tennis racquet and golf club, and he knew instinctively that he was expected to kiss it. He did so, feeling slightly more conspicuous than the Empire State Tower.

"Le temps est long, n'est-ce-pas?" she added as he dropped rather than sat in the little iron-slatted chair across from her.

Somehow the situation didn't seem good theatre. There was something offkey about it, like dark lipstick on a blond or a soprano who sang slightly flat. This woman —she was no girl, but eight or nine and twenty—was decidedly an aristocrat, there was distinction in her every movement, in the curve of her slender, arching neck and delicately cut profile. It didn't seem in character for her to pick him up as if she were some *femme galante*. Of course, General Staff men were comparatively rare, even in Washington, where uniforms were quoted at six cents a gross, still——

She laughed a throaty, pizzacato laugh. *"La, la,* you do not me remember, *mon capitaine?* You have so soon forgot me and the dinner at the Greek Embassy for His Excellency of Czechoslovakia? I am not greatly flattered—"

A tiny mental "alert" sounded deep in Westley's inner consciousness. "You mean the dinner where the Chief Justice told that delightfully droll story?" he asked artlessly.

She nodded almost petulantly, as one who would reprove a dull child stammering at his lessons. "Where else? And—" her laughter bubbled up deliciously again —"I demand you make the *amende honorable* by buying me a champagne glacé at once, *Monsieur le Capitaine!*"

THREE hours and a veritable river of cocktails flowed by, and with every minute and each drink their intimacy ripened. "You've nothing else to do?" he asked finally. "Why not stay here and have dinner with me?"

She nodded graciously. "Why not? Where could I find a more delightful dinner companion, *petit capitaine?*"

She raised her glass and took a delicate, light sip. Her eyes above the goblet's rim were wistful, almost pleading. "You will surely crush them?" she besought. "I'm told you have established fifty flight fields in North Ireland." She searched his face with serious blue eyes. "Is it not truly so? It means so much to my poor country and all the oppressed peoples—"

He shook a deprecating head. "Sorry to sound disappointing, but the sad fact is we've not enough matériel to stretch around.

"All we can spare, and that's not

much, has gone to bolster up the Ruskies—"

"There is no hope that you can reinforce the R.A.F.?" Her eyes had suddenly gone wide and their pupils had expanded like a cat's until they seemed enormous and empty.

"I'm sorry, but that's how it is. We haven't a full dozen bombers in North Ireland, and won't have for almost a year."

"You will excuse me, please?" she begged prettily. "I have to telephone."

"Of course," he checked the grin that came unbidden to his lips as he rose. After all those cocktails he, too, felt like telephoning, or something.

"Waiter," he ordered as she disappeared into the hotel, "plug in a phone here, and hurry!"

He spun the dial: RE 2-3520. "Mr. Huterdon," he ordered when his call was answered, then, "Hullo, Lee. Westley speakin'. Yeah, Seth Westley. Listen, feller, I gotta talk fast. I'm in the sidewalk café of the Ganzevoort, an' I got a customer for you. Grab your hat, pin back your ears and come runnin'. This is positively hot!"

ACROSS the dinner table she glowed in defiant gaiety, lips wine-moist, eyes sparkling with a sort of feverish elation. The cautious precision of her slight accent was relaxed and more and more a slurring guttural crept into her voice. It seemed to him a sort of arrogance had come into her manner, too, as if she were concealing her contempt by sheer force of good breeding.

He glanced up from his roast squab just as a lean, sun-bitten young man in blue flannels and Panama jumped from a taxicab and hurried across the sidewalk. When he looked back at her his eyes were those of a stranger.

"Gracious *Fräulein,*" he asked formally, "may I present my friend Lee Hunterdon —of the F.B.I.?"

She whirled on the newcomer, her

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laughing eyes gone dark and frightened. The scarlet lipstick on her mouth stood out suddenly changing the whole background of her face.

"Good evening, Baroness," Hunterdon bowed ironically. "This is an unexpected pleasure, both for me and the United States Attorney. You've not by any chance forgotten that bench warrant that's been pending for the last six months, have you?"

Deliberately she drew on her doeskin gauntlets, picked up the big flat scarlet kidskin bag that matched her turban and lipstick and the lacquer on her nails. "I have to thank you for a very pleasant dinner—and a delightful surprise, *mon capitaine,*" she told Westley, and he knew that if he lived to be a hundred he could never forget the bitter reproach of the smile that etched itself across her mouth.

"HOW the devil did *you* peg her for a phoney?" asked Hunterdon as he refilled his guest's glass. "Baroness Maria Viktoria Louisa von Hertsche und Hohenschuh is one of Schickelgruber's fanciest pieces of drygoods, and believe me, he's got some honeys. She's made monkeys out of better men than you. Lots better. How come *you* got wise to her?"

Westley grinned at him. "Just a matter of protocol, son."

"Eh?"

"Precisely. You pick up lots o' things besides prickly heat in Washington. For instance, it's against protocol—the social amenities to youse guys—to invite an ambassador and the Chief Justice to dinner at the same time. Their social ranks balance exactly, and no hostess would dare seat one before the other for fear of giving offense. So when this baby said we'd met at dinner with the Czech Ambassador *and* the C. J. I knew whatever else she knew—and she looked like she knew plenty—she didn't know her Washington. Or her fishin'."

"Fishin'?"

"Yeah. Fishin'. Suckers, leastwise U. S. Army suckers, ain't bitin' these days."

THE SHOOTER'S CORNER

Conducted by
PETE KUHLHOFF

This and That

QUESTION: I have a rifle concerning which I should like some information and I believe that you can give it to me. On the side of the stock it is marked, "Edward Maynard, Patented May 27, 1851—Dec. 6, 1859."

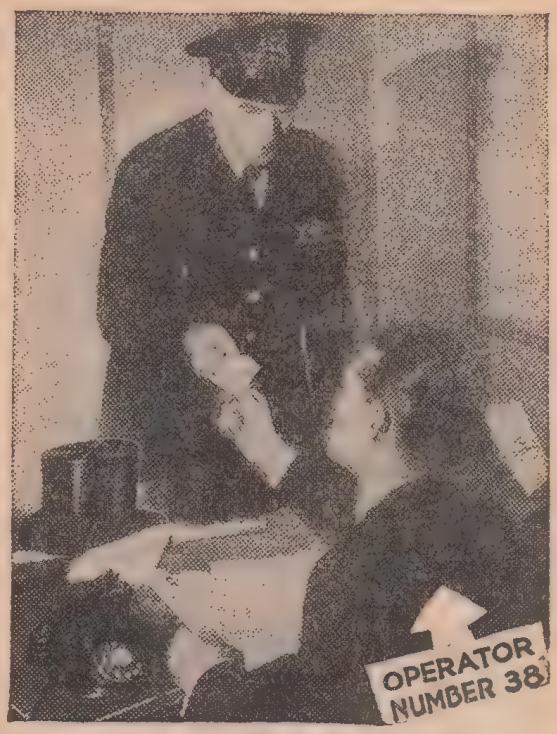
It also is marked, "Mfg. by Mass. Arms, Chicopee Falls, Mass."

The gun has a 26 inch round blue steel barrel and has 4 inches of octagon shape at the breech. It has a checkered pistol grip and is lever action.

It has a peep sight in front and is adjusted for windage. It has Lyman disc rear sight adjusted for elevation and is

Arrest Him, Officer!

I'LL HAVE COMPLETE FACTS ON THE OTHER FELLOW TONIGHT!



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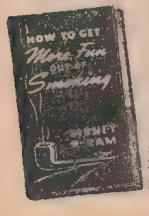

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made with a fitted steel butt plate. With the rifle I have 40 or 50 cartdirge cases and two bullet molds. By caliper the bullets seem to be .45 inches and of course an old-fashioned percussion cap must be used to load each cartridge.

Without knowing the exact load I have been able to make consistent targets at 100 yards. The gun is in good condition—and the barrel is perfectly clean.

I am not at all interested in disposing of the gun but I should like to know of its history as it is the only one of this description that I have seen. It was given to me by a very elderly gentleman who has gone to his reward. As a matter of academic interest only I shall appreciate it if you can tell me if many of these guns were made and what its reasonable intrinsic value is.

I haven't the slightest idea as to whether it is a common or uncommon weapon but from reading your column in SHORT STORIES since its inception I am encouraged to hope that you may be able to furnish the information which I desire. G. E. Page, New York.

ANSWER: Dr. Edward Maynard was a dental surgeon of Washington, D. C. Even before he brought out the Maynard rifle he was well-known for his tape primer mechanism which was patented in 1845.

The first Maynard carbine was of .50 caliber. The cartridge had a hole in the base through which the primer spark or flash ignited the powder. This gun used either the regular percussion cap or the Maynard tape primer. These guns were used during the Civil War, as was the model of 1863 which was marked with lettering similar to your gun. The 20-inch barrel tilted up after sliding forward to unlock. The War Department had purchased over 22,000 of these guns by 1865.

At the end of the Civil War Maynard got busy and brought out a sporting rifle, Model 1865, with various barrel lengths and in .35, .40, and .50 calibers. The same special Maynard brass shells were used. It is interesting to note that this

cartridge was a straight sided tube of brass soldered to a wide flat disc of brass which formed a rim used in extraction. The rim extended far enough on every side of the central flash hole to seal the arm against gas escape. All calibers in this model employed the same size of head which extended far enough beyond the edges of the breech to be grasped by the fingers during extraction.

Fortunately the centrally hung hammer, the nipple and the flash tube conducting sparks to the flash hole at the center of the cartridge were all so placed that a firing pin could be installed without much difficulty, so the 1865 Maynard was changed to the Model of 1873 to handle center fire cartridges designed to use the Berdan primer.

In 1882 another series of cartridges was placed on the market including .35, .38, .40, .44, .45-70, and the .50-70. Later the .22-10-45 C. F., .25-20-86 Single Shot, and .32-35-165 were listed.

These various rifle models were all quite similar. In fact, the Maynard catalogue of 1890 stated that the Model 1865 rifle would be changed to the Model 1873 or 1882 for $8. The Model 1873 rifles could be provided with an inter-changeable firing pin and device to bridge the wide gap between barrel breech and action face to permit the use of .22 rim fire cartridges in .22 Maynard barrels, in addition to regular center-fire combinations.

A good selling point and a distinct advantage over other single shotguns then on the market was the interchangeable barrels. Caliber .22, .25, .32, .35, .40, .44, .45, .50, and .55 rifle, and .55 and .64 shot barrels could be used on one action or breech-piece as the Maynard catalogues called it.

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Rough Sketch of Model 1882 No. 16 Maynard

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As to value—it all depends on how

badly the buyer wants the gun. About a year ago I picked up at auction a Civil War Maynard for two and a half bucks, while more recently I saw a Maynard action and two barrels, all in perfect condition sell for $75.

These guns are not what you would call rare, but on the other hand, you don't find good ones every day of the week. One thing certain they're a lot of fun to shoot.

—o—

This edition of "This and That" seems to have gotten out of hand—I wanted to yap about some new cartridges.

But there is one thing I want to mention before Christmas and that is L. L. Bean's catalogue for the fall of 1942. I was pleasantly surprised to find his prices about the same as last years, and have already ordered and received some much needed equipment. You know that "L. L." manufactures and sells hunting, fishing, and camping paraphernalia direct by mail.

Over a period of years I have bought quite a number of "Bean" items and have always received more than my money's worth. If you want a catalogue drop a card to L. L. Bean, Inc., Freeport, Maine.

And while we're speaking of that famous Maine outdoorsman we might mention the fact that he has written a book. It's called "Hunting, Fishing, and Camping." Mr. Bean writes straight to the point without a lot of fancy talk, and as his only hobby has been hunting and fishing he knows what he's talking about.

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